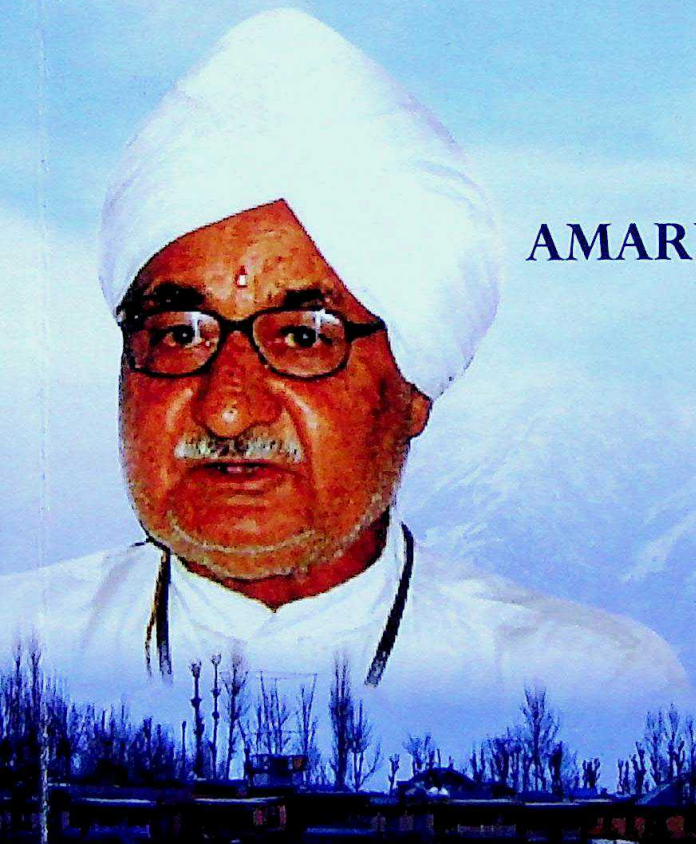


Gandhi Memorial College of Education Bantala Jammu

# THE CHRONICLES OF KASHMIR



AMARNATH VAISHNAVI  
A BIOGRAPHY

BALKRISHAN SANYASI

Edited By

Rohini Vaishnavi

Digitized by srujanika@gmail.com









The Chronicles of  
**Kashmir**  
Biography of a Leader  
**Amarnath Vaishnavi**



J.M. College of Education  
Raipur, Bantalab  
Jammu.

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**Balkrishan Sanyasi**  
Edited by Rohini Vaishnavi

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## Dedicated

To Shri Gopi Nath Vaishnavi, the elder brother of Pandit  
Amarnath Vaishnavi, who cared for him like a mother;  
To Smt Divya Mal & Shri Sarvanand Vaishnavi, parents of  
Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi;  
And his paternal aunt Haer Dyad, who taught him to smile  
always in spite of adversity







## Foreword

**डॉ० जितेन्द्र सिंह**

राज्य मंत्री (स्वतंत्र प्रभार),  
उत्तर पूर्वी क्षेत्र विकास मंत्रालय ;  
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कार्मिक, लोक शिकायत एवं पेंशन मंत्रालय,  
परमाणु ऊर्जा विभाग तथा अंतरिक्ष विभाग,  
भारत सरकार



सत्यमेव जयते

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Department of Atomic Energy and Department of Space,  
Government of India



**FOREWORD**

Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi's lifelong struggle and consistent endeavour for socio-political reforms deserve to be recorded in the history of the region. His life was intertwined with major socio-political events in Jammu & Kashmir as he himself was a major force behind some of the landmark events that left an indelible mark on the destiny of people, particularly the minority community of Kashmiri Pandits.

The biography of Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, "Chronicles of Kashmir", penned down by Balkrishan Sanyasi and edited by Rohini Vaishnavi takes us through the historic events and their interpretation dating back to the accession of Jammu & Kashmir with India. This time period coincides with the active lifetime of Shri Amarnath Vaishnavi who was a social worker and a reformer at grassroot level and one of the founders of the Nationalist Movement in Jammu & Kashmir.

Vaishnavi ji's passion for enabling Kashmiri Pandits to lead a dignified life was immense. This book portrays the character of a person so selfless and altruistic, and yet someone who dared to follow his passion and lead life on his terms and conditions. He was an inspiration for three generations of youth and this book is an attempt to perpetuate goodness in the world.

My best wishes to the Author for bringing out the biography of Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi !

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## Foreword

### THE UNIVERSITY OF JAMMU

The University of Jammu was established in the year 1960. It is one of the oldest universities in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The University has a long and glorious history of academic excellence and research. It has produced many distinguished graduates who have gone on to make significant contributions to the fields of science, literature, and social sciences.



### THE UNIVERSITY OF JAMMU

The University of Jammu is a leading institution of higher learning in the state. It offers a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate programs in various disciplines. The University is committed to providing quality education and fostering a spirit of inquiry and innovation among its students.



Dr. [Name]

The University of Jammu is proud to have a distinguished faculty of scholars and researchers. They are dedicated to advancing knowledge and promoting academic excellence. The University also provides a supportive environment for students to pursue their studies and develop their potential.

The University of Jammu is committed to providing a high-quality education to all its students. It offers a wide range of programs and courses, and is dedicated to ensuring that every student has the opportunity to succeed. The University also provides a variety of extracurricular activities and support services to enhance the student experience.

The University of Jammu is a member of the Association of Universities in Jammu and Kashmir. It is committed to working with other institutions to promote academic excellence and research. The University also provides a variety of services to the community, including continuing education and professional development programs.

The University of Jammu is a leading institution of higher learning in the state. It offers a wide range of programs and courses, and is dedicated to ensuring that every student has the opportunity to succeed. The University also provides a variety of extracurricular activities and support services to enhance the student experience.

Dr. [Name]  
Vice-Chancellor  
The University of Jammu  
Bantalab Jammu

Dr. [Name]	Dr. [Name]
Dr. [Name]	Dr. [Name]
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Dr. [Name]	Dr. [Name]
Dr. [Name]	Dr. [Name]



## Preface

---

This book has been in the making for the last six years. The thought of penning down the biography of a personality of Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi's stature was a great challenge because he was an octogenarian who had left imprints on the history of Kashmir for six decades. It required me to have direct meetings and telephonic interactions with people whom he had worked with to gather their first-hand accounts of him. Extensive research over six years, including a literature review and reading his personal diaries, has led me to write the story of Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi's life, which was intertwined with events of historical importance. While describing his activism, this biography presents a version of the story of Kashmir as seen through the eyes of a social activist who was a major force behind some of the historic events pertaining to Kashmiri Hindus. The book narrates the events from 1947 up to the year 2012, one major event being the mass exodus of minority communities, mostly Hindus, from Kashmir. The details presented in this book have been mostly drawn from the life experiences of Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, which were documented by him in his personal diary and narrated by him to the author during his personal discussions with him and the historic facts researched by the author. The book describes the status of Kashmiri Hindus dating back to the pre-independence era, the subsequent events that shaped the socio-cultural and political environment in J&K, the sowing of the seeds of terrorism, which were sown far earlier than they showed up and the events that led to one of the world's largest mass exodus of people in their own country followed by the events and struggles after their exodus. The book is an insight into the brutal majoritarian domination in Kashmir with covert elements helping the anti-socials and anti-nationals and therein the



role of a patriot of purpose, social worker of humane instinct and human being of commitment, Late Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi.

I had a personal motivation for writing this book as Amarnath ji was my father's younger brother, and in the Kashmiri joint family system, we all live together as a large family. I spent time with him discussing matters of serious nature. His trust in me increased as I grew older, and our emotional bond was immense. He has been the spirit of my emotional making. Lala ji, as we fondly called him, stood by me and my siblings like a father. As a writer, I could not have silently spent a lifetime without penning down the story of my beloved uncle and father figure, an extraordinary person.

Amarnath Vaishnavi was soft and affectionate yet bold and a harbinger of change who tried to make a positive impact on the lives of Kashmiri Pandits from time to time. He assumed a major role in various historic movements, such as the Praja Parishad movement of 1949 & the Kashmiri Pandit agitation of 1967. He worked at the grassroots level and voluntarily visited people's homes in the villages and towns of Kashmir to know their problems. He dared to initiate the practice of hoisting the national flag in Handwara on Independence Day for the first time in the history of Kashmir in the 1950s, which was a courageous initiative by a person belonging to the vulnerable minority community. He led delegations to several prime ministers and presidents of India to apprise them of the ground realities of Kashmir from time to time. The impact of such initiatives resulted in the setting up of three commissions, namely the Gajendra Gadkar Commission, Dayal Commission and Kohli Commission by the government, to safeguard the rights of minorities and initiate an enquiry into the atrocities of 1967. Being an RSS pracharak, he was jailed during the emergency in 1975. In January 1990, after the killings of the minority community by terrorists, he once again led a delegation to meet then Prime Minister Mr. V P Singh and persuaded him to invite Mr. Jagmohan to become the governor and impose Governor's rule in Kashmir. He personally met Mr. Jagmohan and put forward his request to which he agreed, and finally, Mr. Jagmohan was called to take charge as the governor. He was a born leader who was a hope for society because he could



see the possibilities that no one dared to imagine. He was also honoured with the title “Father of the Kashmiri Pandit Community.” Mr. Kulvinder Gupta, the then Mayor of the Jammu Municipal Corporation, compared him with the Yasser Arafat of Palestinians, and BJP General Secretary Mr. Ashok Khajuria called him the Lala Lajpat Rai of Kashmiri Pandits. He had a tremendous influence in the corridors of power and was respected by politicians and bureaucrats. He was heard by the likes of Farooq Abdullah, Jagmohan, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Balraj Madhok and Lal Krishna Advani. Due to his followership and soft but assertive personality, admired by the masses and the government and politicians, he became eligible to represent Kashmiri Pandits at most of the forums and negotiate with the government on their behalf at all times. A man who was so influential was never tempted to accumulate wealth or to use power to help himself or his close family members.

It was important to tell his story to the whole world because narrating the stories of people who do good for society is essential for restoring the hope of the newer generations in goodness and humanity.







## Introduction

---

It is a great pleasure and privilege to write an introduction for this volume on the life and works of Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi. I was not fortunate enough to meet Amarnath ji in person; it is only through several writings about him that I know of his innumerable contributions to society in general and to Kashmiri Pandits in particular. Though many articles and reports have been written about Pt Vaishnavi ji (fondly addressed to as Lala ji), it is for the first time that a detailed volume has been compiled on his early life, his career journey as a social and political activist, his becoming a respectable leader of the Kashmiri masses, who developed full faith and trust in him. Pandit Vaishnavi was a man with clear thoughts and vision. He was a selfless and courageous person who brought hope in the eyes of whosoever seemed to have met him. Indeed, he has left a legacy which is now being documented in this book. Every chapter of the book is a story never told before, as the book is a result of the first-hand experiences of Pandit Vaishnavi, which is important because he spent six decades as a social activist who influenced various decisions of the government and led mass movements. I am sure the book will inspire many young minds to follow his path and realize what it takes to be a good leader and a hero, which he was for the KP community. Reading about the life of such personalities as Pt Vaishnavi ji also teaches the qualities one needs to imbibe and cultivate as a leader and worker to uplift society and build minds for the future.

We witnessed his selfless service for the Kashmiri Pandits, living in camps in the Jammu area after their exodus from the valley in 1990. One thing that struck me most was his passion for seeing through that every child of the migrant family got a good education so they could carve out a bright future for



themselves. Today we realise that his commitment and drive in this direction helped many of our children to live a life of dignity. This ecosystem that he built and encouraged has turned out to be a catalyst for the upliftment of our community which had encountered significant loss due to the forced exodus.

The author of this book, Shri Balkrishan Sanyasi, is a political scientist and has vast experience to fathom the developments in the socio-political ecosystem in Jammu and Kashmir as also in the country. Ms. Rohini Vaishnavi, who runs the R V Learning Foundation, is, of course, aware of the personal and public life of Amarnath ji. Both of them are very competent and knowledgeable in illustrating the achievements of Pandit Vaishnavi during his entire life and also from different perspectives.

(Padmashri) Dr. Sudhir. K. Sopory, Professor  
DST-SERB Distinguished Fellow  
International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, New  
Delhi  
Former: Vice Chancellor, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi



## Author's Note

*Mr. Amarnath Vaishnavi was a patriot by core who played a pioneering role in the Praja Parishad movement and subsequent pro-national movements in the state for J&K's total integration with the Indian union. He served the people of the state selflessly and left an example for others to follow. Pandit Vaishnavi was, in the real sense, a dedicated Swayamsevak who never thought of his own interests. I find it strange that a person serving the nation for over six decades did not have a house to live in. Though the mass exodus perturbed Pandit Vaishnavi a lot, he continued to work for the betterment of the community. Due to his tireless efforts, many state governments agreed to reserve seats in professional colleges for displaced students.*

Late Mr. Arun Jaitley  
Politician & Advocate







## Author's Note

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**A**marnath Vaishnavi was no doubt worried about Kashmir, but his thought always perceived Kashmir as part of a bigger picture, and that was the nation as a whole. The same view has enhanced my worries when I face the issues confronting India. The biggest problem is the falsehood spread through media and the pseudo-elements in the country to cover up the bigger plans of jihadis and Marxists to convert India into a battlefield by changing its demography to install a rule like the pre-British era. Urban Naxalites and Award Wapsi groups have words like lynchistan, Azadi, and intolerance on their respective lists.

Shri Anand Ranganathan, ex-Professor of JNU and an author, started his lecture while speaking to the students of JNU, saying that before Modi came to power, India was a garden of Eden. Still, he continued to say that bad dissent leads to scaremongering, and the genesis of scaremongering is selectivity which will be destructive for the younger generation. He said that the lynching of Akhlaq is highlighted for calling India lynchistan. But how many people know that during 2016-17, Muslims and Hindus were attacked by Muslims a hundred times? Similarly, there were 36 attacks by Muslims on Dalits. He further said that the Indian constitution was first amended immediately after Jawaharlal Nehru took over as the prime minister. The amendment reads as "reasonable restrictions disrupting public order", under which many restrictions were imposed, and many books were banned. The books included Tagore's Gora, Godse's Testimony and Aziz Beg's Captured Kashmir.

V.P. Menon mentioned in his book "The Story of the Integration of the Indian States" that Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru did not pay any attention to the repeated requests of Maharaja Hari Singh to send the Indian Foundation to Kashmir to repulse



the attack by Pakistani raiders at the beginning of October 1947 because of the delay in the signing of the instrument of accession. The delayed landing of the Indian army in Kashmir resulted in the capture of a large portion of Kashmir by Pakistan. Nehru even stopped the Indian army from proceeding further across the borders from 11<sup>th</sup> November onwards, which would have otherwise led to the recapture of the lost territory from Pakistan and prevented the killings of 32000 Hindus and Sikhs in Mirpur, now in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir. The question, therefore, arises as to why only selective narratives are being floated, having no basis. Amplification of lies has, in my opinion, the purpose of blackmailing the peaceful, silent majority of India. This apprehension I am carrying with me is also reflected in my writing as a biographer.

The struggle of Kashmiri Pandits in exile right since their exodus from Kashmir has passed through a crucial stage. The community has high expectations from the power centres to have a lasting solution to their problems. All State Kashmiri Pandit Conference (ASKPC), headed by Amarnath Vaishnavi from 1987 to 2012, has been at the forefront of fighting for the rights and rehabilitation of Kashmiri Pandits. Various other organizations like Panun Kashmir movement, All India Kashmiri Samaj (AIKS), Kashmiri Samiti Delhi, the Youth wing of AIKS, Kashmiri Pandit Sabha Jammu, Kashmiri Pandit Conference and many more have also been actively seeking justice for the Pandit community in exile to enable their permanent settlement with honour in the valley of Kashmir.

Writing this book would not have been possible without the support of the Late Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi's family members, friends and associates. I acknowledge the support of every person I approached. I am grateful to R.K. Raina, Ashok Kumar Braroo, Brig Suchet Singh, Dr. Agnishekhar, Ashwani Chhangoo, Rajinder Prasad Kampasi, Swami Kumar ji, Ashok Kaul, C.L Kaul, Heera Lal Bhat, Shiban Krishan Pandita, Reva Kachroo Jalali, Motilal Malla, Dr Susheel Watal, Kundan Kashmiri and Dr. Kashi Nath Pandita. They all were excited about this book and hence were quite forthcoming and supportive at all times to help me with any kind of information or any other support.



I acknowledge the efforts of my daughter Rohini Vaishnavi who translated the personal diaries of the late Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi into English, compiled all my writings and edited the content to give it the form of a book.

Last but not least, I am grateful to my wife, Veena ji, without whom this work could not have seen the light of day.

Balkrishan Sanyasi



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## Chapter 1

### Kashmir—The Land of His Birth

**N**ilmata Purana is a historical document depicting Kashmir valley and was written somewhere between the sixth to seventh century AD in Kashmir.

It documents the history of Kashmir valley viz-a-viz, its evolution, the lifestyle of Nagas, who were its aborigines and that of the Aryans. It documents the religion, customs, rituals and festivals and the information about those people who came from various places to occasionally settle in the valley of Kashmir. It also mentions the Topography of Kashmir Valley. According to Nilmata Purana, the Aryans settled alongside river Saraswati and migrated to other areas, including present-day Punjab and further to the Yamuna, Ganga and Saryu Rivers plains. It says that an enterprising group of people went to the mountains in the north to reside in the Kashmir Valley. Those who resided in Kashmir mainly came from the banks of the river Saraswati which had vanished before they migrated to the valley. They sought the protection of Neel, the King of Nagas who ruled Kashmir, and later they sought his permission to settle in the valley permanently. King Neel promised to permit them to settle in the valley on the condition that they conformed to the social norms, rituals and customs of the Nagas, to which they agreed. This settlement came about 5000 to 6000 years ago, correlating with Saptrishi Samvat.

It can be well said that Nilmata Purana is not Naga-centric. Admittedly, there are a few places, rivers and a few Naga kings who are venerated, but there is a mention of Gods and Goddesses who have manifested particularly in Bharat Varsha. Thus, the Aryans coming from the banks of river Saraswati were now



## 2 | K a s h m i r - t h e L a n d o f H i s B i r t h

known as Saraswat Brahmins, who are present-day Kashmiri Pandits. Some later migrated towards the plains in India due to political changes during the Mughal era and currently reside in several other parts of India. Those who stayed back accepted the Vedic religion and, after that, Buddhism. Kalhan says that even before King Ashoka (300AD), Kashmir had many Buddha Viharas. Kashmir has been the place of Sanskrit learning for about 2000 years. Panini, the Father of Sanskrit grammar, was from Kashmir. In the last part of the 8<sup>th</sup> century Vasu Gupta, a well-known Kashmiri spiritualist, introduced the Shiv Sutra in Kashmir. This appealed to the earnest Kashmiri Hindu seeker who could enlighten himself with the knowledge of eternal bliss that can be attained by accepting that Shakti, who is devoted to Shiva, is active in revealing Shiva. Vasu Gupta found 77 Shlokas (verses) etched on stones at Mahadev peak, as revealed to him in his dream, and he named them sutras.

A school called Kashmir Shaivism is stated to have originated around 400 AD near Kailash in the Himalayas. However, the first teacher of the refined Kashmiri Shaivism called Trika Philosophy was Tryambak Aditya. After that, it was explained and elaborated by Abhinav Gupta, Bhatta Kallata (9<sup>th</sup> century) and Utpal Acharya (10th century). Abhinav Gupta's literary period extended from 990 to 1015 AD. Khemraj, Jayaratha, Suman Bhatt, Sahib Koul, Bhaskar Kanth, Maheshwar Nath Razdhan, Balji Nath Pandit, Neelkanth Gurtoo and Swami Lakshman Ju carried forward the legacy of teaching and preaching of Shaiva philosophy along with its shakti form. Swami Lakshman Ju revived the Kashmiri Trika philosophy to make it convenient for a commoner to understand the genesis of this philosophy. C. L Koul's book on Kashmir Shaivism can be called the latest edition in understanding Kashmir Shaivism in its proper perspective. In this regard, the contribution made by a renowned poet and artist of Kashmir, Shri Ghulam Rasool Santosh, cannot be forgotten. He explained the intricacies of the Tantra concept of Abhinav Gupta through his paintings.



As per recorded history, the first king of Kashmir was Govnanda, a political ally of Magadha's king Jarasandha, the father-in-law of Kansa. Govnanda and Jarasandha were both killed in wars, and Lord Krishna architected their death. Jarasanda's son Damodara after becoming king of Kashmir, fought against Lord Krishna to avenge his father's death but was killed. Lord Krishna appointed Yashomati, the widow of Damodara as the ruler of Kashmir. After taking over as the ruler, Yashomati gave birth to a boy named Govananda II. This was the period when the Mahabharata was on. Govananda II became the ruler of Kashmir when he attained maturity.

Maharaja Ashoka, who extended his rule up to Kashmir, is considered to be the founder of Shri Nagri (Srinagar). Ashoka and his son ruled Kashmir from 273-232 B.C. After them, Kushans ruled Kashmir, amongst whom Kanishka was the most powerful king who extended his empire up to western India and Central Asia. Under him, Buddhism became the state religion of Kashmir. Mihirakula Hun invaded Kashmir in 515 AD and ruthlessly ruled Kashmir up to 550 AD. After him, the local rulers ruled Kashmir, which included Karkota Dynasty. The rule of Lalitaditya, Awantiverman and Jaya Simha was the rule of piety. Lalitaditya, a powerful king, ruled Kashmir and extended his empire to Azerbaijan. He ruled Kashmir from 724 to 761 AD. He was the third son of Karkota, King Pratapaditya. He successfully led expeditions to Asia and other kingdoms in the rest of India then. Pure Hindu rule started at the beginning of the 7th century with the coming of Meghavahan and Parvarsen II. Awantiverman, who ruled Kashmir from 855 – 883 AD, founded the Utpala dynasty, known for patronizing great scholars and philosophers. He got silt and boulders removed from Jhelum (Vitasta) by his engineer Suyya because of whom, Sopore got its name. The Utpala dynasty ruled Kashmir up to 939 AD. From 939 to 949 AD, Sri Yashaskaradeva, from the Brahmin dynasty, ruled Kashmir. The Gupta dynasty ruled Kashmir from 949 to 1003 AD. Didda, daughter of the Chief of Lohara and wife of Kshema Gupta (950-958 AD), was Kashmir's first known woman ruler. She was an able and courageous



administrator. She ruled first as regent of her son from 958-972 AD and later as a ruler from 981-1003 AD.

From 1003 to 1320, Kashmir was ruled by the Lohara dynasty, who were the Hindu rulers. Suhadeva (Damra) was the last king of this dynasty, who ascended the throne in 1301. He had an able prime minister and commander-in-chief by the name of Ramachandra. His daughter Kota who had married Suhadeva helped his father. From the north, a Buddhist prince Rinchan came to Kashmir. Ramachandra took Rinchan in his service. During the reign of Suhadeva from 1301 to 1320, Kashmiri Brahmins ran for life. In the year 1322 AD, a king from Turkistan named Dulacha came with a 70,000-strong army to Kashmir, bringing its destruction and converting Hindus to Islam. Suhadeva escaped to Kishtwar to save his life, as he could not protect Kashmir. Dulacha returned after eight months of loot and murder to his home with 50,000 Brahmins as slaves, but on his way home, he, along with his army and slaves, was trapped by snow, and they all perished. After that, Bulbul Shah, a Sayed from Turkistan, entered Kashmir and converted Rinchan to Islam. Rinchan became king of Kashmir in 1320, and then he also converted Kashmiri Brahmins to Islam. From here, the demography of Kashmir changed entirely. Between 1318 to 1338 AD, there was a rebellion and war. Shahmir also joined Ramachandra when Dulacha, Tartar chief from Central Asia, attacked Kashmir. After Suhadeva and his brother Udyandeva fled Kashmir, Ramachandra, with the help of his daughter Kota Rani, Rinchan and Shahmir, managed the affairs of the state. Afterwards, the Gaddis of Kishtwar raided Kashmir, but they were beaten back by the forces sent by Ramachandra, who declared himself the king. Rinchan rose to revolt, driving Ramachandra and his daughter Kota Rani to the Lahra (Lar) fort, where Rinchan's men killed the former. Kota Rani married Rinchan, and he was declared king. Rinchan, being a Muslim, named himself Sadrudin, so he became the first Muslim king of the valley. With the help of his wife, Rinchan ruled wisely and justly. Then, Udyandeva suddenly appeared and advanced towards Kashmir. Kota Rani offered the throne to him, and he ascended the throne and married Kota Rani.



Kota Rani took a firm hand in the administration, but Shahmir revolted, seized power, and proposed marriage to Kota Rani. Kota Rani ultimately stabbed herself to death. Thus, it ended the Hindu royalty in 1339.

While concluding, it is important to mention here that Sayyid Jalaluddin of Bukhara and Sayyid Tajuddin, the cousin of Meer Ali Hamdani, followed Bulbul Shah. Meer Ali Hamdani visited Kashmir three times. When he came to Kashmir for the third time in 1383 AD, he came with about 700 Sayeds, and another 300 came with his son. Till then, Kashmir was Islamized.

Sultan Sikander crushed the Brahmins of Kashmir in the 14th century. Sultan Sikander was also known as Butshikan (one who breaks idols). Sultan Zainulabidin was the son of Sultan Sikander, who had converted thousands of Brahmins to Islam. However, Sultan Zainulabidin's rule from 1420-1470 AD remained peaceful. A great Kashmiri Pandit physician Shriya Bhatt lived during Zainulabidin's reign in Kashmir. He was instrumental in curing a fatal disease of the ruler. The king wanted to reward Shriya Bhatt for his treatment as per the physician's choice. Shriya Bhatt thus demanded that all those Kashmiri Pandits who had earlier fled from the valley to various places outside Kashmir to save their Brahminhood be called back by issuing instructions to that effect. Zainulabidin, also called Badshah, immediately did the needful and many Kashmiri pandits returned to Kashmir. This is how Shriya Bhatt made a selfless effort to get his community members repatriated in Kashmir who were earlier forced to leave their homes and hearth.

From the 15th Century AD, Kashmir was ruled by Mughals, Afghans and Sikhs.

In his book "The Kashmiri Pandit", Pandit Anand Koul writes, "In the time of Sultan Shahabuddin (1359-1378 AD), Mir Syed Ali came to Kashmir from Hamdan (Persia) and engaged himself in proselytizing. The Brahmins were



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firm in strictly keeping their caste. Only eleven families remained; all others were either converted or fled the valley.”

In the 16th century, when Aurangzeb ruled the country and spread his tentacles to convert Kashmiri Pandits to Mohammedanism, a group of Kashmiri Pandits on their way to the Amarnath Yatra gave due thought to their problem and formed a delegation led by Pandit Kirpa Ram Dutt to meet Guru Teg Bahadur at Anandpur Sahib, Punjab. It was here that Guru Gobind Singh, on hearing from his revered father Guru Teg Bahadur that some great Man's sacrifice could save Kashmiri Pandits, asked his father that there is no greater man than Guru Teg Bahadur himself to offer sacrifice for this great cause. Thus, Guru Teg Bahadur laid down his life to prevent the mass conversion of Kashmiri Pandits. So, one can say that the delegation of the Kashmiri Pandits led by Pandit Kripa Ram Dutt was instrumental in the martyrdom of Guru Teg Bahadur. The rule of the Pathans, which commenced in 1753 AD, was the darkest age in Kashmiri history. Pandit Birbal Dhar, whom Pandit Anand Koul considered a pioneer, induced Maharaja Ranjit Singh to take charge of Kashmir with undaunted perseverance. The people of Kashmir had their wistful eyes turned towards the Sikhs, hoping they might come and liberate them from the tyrannies of the Afghans. Birbal Dhar, who, along with Mirza Pandit Dhar and Sukh Ram Safaya, was appointed by Azim Khan as revenue collectors, could not prove to be of any help to him, and the revenue collection fell short of Rs one lakh. Birbal Dhar's escape had become imminent, and he and his son escaped and pursued Maharaja Ranjit Singh to take over the reins of Kashmir. Maharaja Ranjit Singh invaded Kashmir with his troops in the company of Birbal Dhar. Under the command of Gulab Singh of Jammu, Ranjit Singh's forces started a multipronged battle around Kashmir. The Sikh army captured Kashmir, and Sikh rule was established in Kashmir in June 1819, which ended in June 1846. After that, Kashmir was governed by the Dogras of Jammu. Maharaja Gulab Singh of Jammu made its beginning. Jabar Khan, the last



Afghan Governor in Kashmir, got wounded and fled to Afghanistan. In this way, the Afghan rule in 1820 AD ended after 67 years.

In the middle of the 19th century, Kashmiri Pandits had become fully conscious of the factors of Majoritarianism in Kashmir. Shri Hargopal Koul, a legendary personality of the Kashmiri Pandit community, emerged as the powerful leader of the community in the early 1920s. He formed an organization known as “Dharam Sabha” and watched the interests of his community in the state. His voice was forceful enough to raise social, political and economic community issues and fight against all kinds of disparities. Shri Hargopal Koul died in 1925. From 1925 to 1931, Kashmiri Pandits assembled occasionally to form a vibrant Hindu organization. They ultimately came under one flag in 1931. This organization was called “All State Kashmiri Pandit Conference Sanatan Dharam Yuvak Sabha (ASKPC)”, headquartered at Sheetalnath in Srinagar. The constitution of this organization made it clear that the Kashmiri Pandit community would elect the president of the organization and that it would be his prerogative to constitute its executive body which included the Vice President, General Secretary, Treasurer and other executive members. The first president of ASKPC was Pandit Prem Nath Bazaz, followed by Pandit Kashyap Bandhu as its second president. The other presidents were Justice Jialal Kilam, Pandit Shivnarayan Fotedar, Pandit Harjilal Raina and Dr Shambunath Peshin. Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi was elected as the sixth president in the year 1987, and he continued to be the elected president till the year 2012, when he passed away. Pandit Heeralal Chatta and Pandit Radhakrishnan Raina were the subsequent presidents, respectively. Advocate Ravinder Raina was elected as the president in 2014. The current office is located at Duraganagar, Jammu.

Kashmir has remained an abode of saints and seers from time immemorial. The morning smile of the surrounding mountains, the melodies coming from the gushing streams, its colourful splendour and silence all around have rendered the valley of Kashmir a valley where yogis have



attained salvation from time to time. A veteran journalist, Pandit MK Tikku, has rightly said, “Kashmir is situated in happy isolation from the dusty mainland plains. Partly as a result of this isolation, its people down the centuries have taken to intellectual pursuits. Because of this, Kashmir produced many intellectual luminaries throughout its history who also contributed to Indian thought and literature. This land can boast of giving the rest of India a galaxy of talented men and women. Kashmir has produced veteran social reformers, preachers, politicians, historians, leaders, scholars, poets and writers of repute from time to time who have enriched Kashmir’s culture in a big way.” While talking about Kashmir, Dr KM Panikar, a statesman and scholar, observed, “Walled off by high mountains and endowed with unequalled natural beauty, Kashmir remained an isolated sanctuary of Indian culture. Until the 14th century, Buddhism, Shaivism, and Sanskrit learning flourished in the valley and produced a remarkably rich culture. The integration of life in Kashmir was so complete that in one of his books, Kshemendra, a Shaivite, produced the Adivadanas of Buddha, a classic in literature.” Kalhana Pandit was the first Sanskrit historian of the Middle Ages. While talking about Kalhan’s Rajatarangini of the 12th century, RS Pandit compares it with Homer and Aeschylus as a poet of veracity. In one of his writings, Prof. AN Dhar says, “We can take legitimate pride in being the progeny of the great Rishis of the Vedic times.” While the saints and sages of the valley have been our leading lights in the immediate background, the Vedas and the Upanishads, including the Gita, continue to be the main fountains of spiritual knowledge for us.” About Shaivism in Kashmir, Prof. Dhar says, “With the advent of Islam in the 14th century and socio-political developments that followed, the Shaivite practice, no doubt, survived as a cult, but the related study has suffered a decline. It was Ishwar Swaroop Swami Lakshman Ju who made a memorable contribution to the recent revival of relevant Shaivite studies in Kashmir through the explication of the related Sanskrit texts, a task in which he



remained wholly absorbed all his life in the past century.” Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta have expanded spiritual truths in a novel and distinct way.

Kashmir has had a rich heritage of art, terracotta and sculpture since the Neolithic age. Kashmiri artists and sculptors depicted lord Buddha in their paintings and sculptures, which had reached China, Central Asia, Tibet and Gilgit, which is now in Pak-occupied Kashmir. In the 8th Century, King Lalitaditya Mukhta Peeda constructed a sun temple at Martand in north Kashmir. He established a city called Parihaspur near Srinagar. In this city, he constructed temples with architectural combinations of Shiva, Vishnu, and Buddha temples. King Awantivarman, in the year 855 AD, furthered this move by constructing temples having idols of lord Shiva and lord Vishnu at Awantipur in south Kashmir. His son Shankar Varman carried this move further by constructing temples at Pattan near Baramulla in north Kashmir. Unfortunately, the Sultan rulers of Kashmir destroyed all this in the fourteenth century. Nevertheless, the pieces of these marvels of art and sculpture, which also includes gold and other metallic substances, are preserved even today in the top-class museums of the world.

Buddhist thought had reached Kashmir at the beginning of the 3rd century BC when Kashmiri Pandits had gone deep into Vedas and Upanishads. However, Kashmiri Pandits had no aversion to it and developed a new thought of Buddhism known as Hinayana, which presented a view of modifying Buddhism based on Shaivism. They declared Buddha as the incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Kashmiri Brahmins spread Buddhism in China, Tibet, Japan and Cambodia.

Kashmiris had developed their script called Sharada script for the Kashmiri language. Kashmir was enriched by the spiritual and humanistic verses of Lalleshwari called vakhs, Sheikh Nuruddin Noorani's (also known as Nund Rishi) verses called shrukhs and Roopa Bhavani's verses called vakhs. Lalleshwari and Nund Rishi appeared on the scene in the 13th century, whereas Roopa Bhavani existed in the 16th century. Both Lalleshwari and



Roopa Bhavani's teachings reached us through Shaivism-oriented philosophy, whereas Nund Rishi was preaching Islam, and he had imbibed in him the qualities of a Rishi, thereby renouncing worldly comforts and having more or less adopted a non-dualistic philosophy in the process of realization of God. From the 14th century onwards, many saints and saintly poets, both Hindus and Muslims, preached equality among the people through their poetry. Meanwhile, through all these years, a school of thought called Sufi also emerged, and many Muslim poets contributed to this thought, preaching equality and providing ways and means to attain the realization of God. Sufi thought, which occupied the mindset of an average Kashmiri, took birth in the shape of Sufi literature in Kashmir right from the 12th century. The Sufi poets, with their Shaivite and Vaishnavite philosophies, reached the people's minds through their romantic verses and Raas Leelas and created meditational awareness among the people. There is a long list of Kashmiri Pandits who have excelled not only in the field of art and literature but have also proved brave enough to protect the honour of their community and guard against the hatred and onslaught which led to the killings and religious conversions for centuries in their land also called "The Reshi Vaer" (the land of saints). They proved crusaders to keep alive the age-old culture of Kashmir which was coming under the threat of foreign invasions right from the 13th century.

Chinese travellers Huyen Tsang and Ou-kong, who visited Kashmir and engaged themselves in studying Sanskrit here in 631 and 759 AD, respectively, said, "No scholar could be considered well accomplished unless and until he had associated himself with the illustrious and learned men in Kashmir for several years and taken lessons from them." Huyen Tsang writes, "The people of Kashmir love learning and are well cultured. For centuries learning has been held in great respect in Kashmir."

Alberuni, who accompanied Mohammad Ghaznavi to Punjab in 1021 AD, writes, "Kashmir is the High school of Hindu sciences." Pandit Anand Koul, a great historian of Kashmir, in his book "The Kashmiri Pandit", says, "The



Valley of Kashmir was the home 'in simplicity sublime' of Rishis or sages, hermits and ascetics who cared little for worldly power or enjoyment and, who glorifying in divine love, chose to live on one side or the other of the line that marks the minimum of the subsistence. They formed a race, which, secluded from the world in this Valley, stood aloft under the purity and the grandeur of their heritage. In this secluded depth of the forests, men pondered deeply upon the nature of things, and a discussion of the problems of the universe was a favourite pastime."

Thus, Kashmir gave birth to ascetics, thinkers and social activists of eminence. The ascetics who created history were Siddha Srikantha, Lalleshwari, Nund Reshi, Rupa Bhawani, Jaman Ded, Rishi Peer, Zanana Zui, Krishna Pandit Taploo, Bhaskar Razdan, Krishna Kar, Manas Razdan, Sodiwani, Jiwan Sahib, Mirza Kak, Nidhan Sahib, Chana Sahib, Gopal Sahib, Ishwar Sahib, Govind Bayu, Manas Mattoo, Anand Ji, Lal Shah, Labi Sahib, Ganesh Dass, Thakur Prasad Chowdhry, Kashkak, Swami Nandlal, Nandlal Dass Mastana, Grata Bab, Bhagawan Gopinath. Apart from meditating, propounding various philosophies and spreading spiritual messages, Kashmiri Pandits have not only excelled in different fields from time to time but have been the founders or forerunners of various professions in which they excelled, in and outside the state.

The first person to start a residential Gurukul, Rama Krishna Ashram, at Baramulla, was Pandit Tara Chand Saproo. The first Kashmiri Pandit teacher to write a book on Education and Science was Pandit Satlal Razdan. The first person to introduce the Devanagari script as a medium of instruction for the Kashmiri language was Professor Srikanth Toshkhani. The first houseboat builder and fleet owner was Pandit Narayan Das. The first and only shipping magnate was Pandit Ravi Tickoo. The first to introduce photography and printing in the Valley was Pandit Vishnath Kampasi. The pioneer of modern printing in India was Pandit Krishna Prasad Dhar. The First Indian Judge of the Calcutta High Court (appointed by Queen Victoria) was Justice Shamboo



Nath Pandit. Justice KN Wanchoo was the first and the only Kashmiri Pandit to hold the august office of Chief Justice of India. The first Kashmiri Pandit Lady as a District Judge was Ms Sudesh Warikoo. The first Kashmiri to receive the Sahitya Academy Award was Master Zinda Koul. The first grammar of the Kashmiri language in Sanskrit was written by Pandit Ishwar Koul in 1875 AD. The first book on the history and ethnography of Kashmiri Pandits, "Kashmiri Pandits", was written by Pandit Anand Koul. The first Medical Professional in the state to dissect a human body was Doctor ML Koul Gassi. The first Kashmiri Chief Engineer, born at Moran in Gwalior in 1872 AD, was Pandit Sri Krishna Gurtoo. The first Kashmiri to receive the Soviet Nehru Award was Pandit Dina Nath Koul Nadim. The first from the J&K state to be nominated as a member of the Royal College of Physicians London was Doctor Gwash Lal Koul. The first in India to use Radioactive Isotopes in Clinical Medicines and the Syndrome of Neurological and Hepatic Involvement in Influenza was Doctor Col. Saligram Koul. The only person from J&K state to get into Indian Civil Services (ICS and IFS) London was Pandit Triloki Nath Koul Jalali. The first and only Kashmiri Chief of Air Staff was Air Marshal Swaroop Krishna Koul. The first Kashmiri girl to have been commissioned as a scientist and inducted into the Indian Army was Captain A. Munshi.



## Chapter – 2

### Ancestral History and Early Life

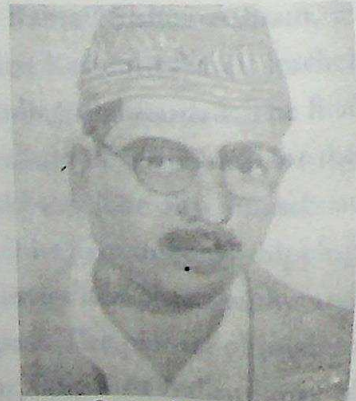
#### Family History

Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi was born to Shri Sarvanand Vaishnavi and Divyamali in Bhadrapad Mas, Krishnapaksha, and Dashmi on 24th August 1925 at Mastgarh in Jammu. The year coincided with the coronation of Maharaja Hari Singh. He lived in the house of Nanakchand Zargar and was born in Vaishnav Sampraday. His gotra was Patswamin Kaushik, and their Kulguru was Shri Vallabhacharya Ji.



Sarvanand Vaishnavi

He had an elder brother, Shri Gopinath Vaishnavi, who was born to his father and Tejmal, his father's first wife and who passed away a few years after marriage. His brother, whom he called "Bhaji", loved him the most, like a mother and was ten years older than him. As per Kashmiri Pandit value systems, families did not break; they remained united in Pandit homes.



Gopinath Vaishnavi



His first school was “State Primary School”, Nai Dhaki, Jammu and his first friends were Mehta Gaje Singh and Vaid Vishno Datt. The latter became an MP in the 13<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha and worked closely with Pandit Vaishnavi when they formed the J & K Sahayata Samiti after the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits in 1990 to facilitate their rehabilitation. They all became close friends in 1936 in the Pul Tawi Secondary School during his primary school years.

His father, Sarvanand, had two brothers and three sisters. Sarvanand was the youngest of the siblings. His parents had passed away when he was four, and his maternal uncle had raised him. His grandmother, it is said, was a very good swimmer. Shri Eshwardas was the eldest brother who took care of all the younger siblings. The second brother was Shri Haldar Ram, who was saintly and chose not to marry. Shri Haldar Ram and Shri Eshwardas ran a shop in Chadura, Badgam. Shri Eshwardas had three sons and two daughters. Therefore, there were five brothers and two sisters in the family, and Amarnath was the youngest of all. Amarnath’s mother passed away when he was about eighteen months old, but there was no dearth of love in the family. He was fortunate to get the love of his three paternal aunts, two uncles, and his brother and father. He also inherited a distinguished family history and a saintly temperament from his paternal aunt “Hari”, who taught him to always be happy despite adversities.

### Ancestral Heritage

It was his ancestral heritage not to have any greed for money and to possess high self-esteem. Therefore, their livelihood was earned with honest money. Maanji Vaishnavi was one of the descendants of Vaishnavis, who was managing a carpet factory which belonged to a Pathan. His master had complete faith in Maanji. However, Pathan’s two sons were mischievous. One day they came to Maanji asking him to give them money for drinking alcohol without the knowledge of their father. However, Maanji refused to give them the money as he thought it unethical. The next morning, when Maanji was performing



Pooja on the river bank, both boys came with the pieces of beef and threatened to put them in his mouth if he did not pay them the money. Maanji had a conflict in his mind about whether to give up life or accept something (beef) which was ethically unacceptable to him; he did not consider paying the money as a third option. Finally, he decided to give up his life to follow his moral values. He had to either give them money or eat beef; both were unethical; therefore, he chose to give up his life. He deliberately started using profane language, because of which the Pathan boys got very angry. They threw the beef and stabbed him to death. Maanji died on the spot. He gave up his life for his ideals.

Sarvanand Vaishnavi's grandfather, Shri Sahajram Vaishnavi, worked in the same firm where his uncle Shri Maanji Vaishnavi worked. It was during the reign of the Sikhs that Sahajram used to tutor the children of the Saproo family, who was a minister to the King. During the Pathan rule, before the Sikh rule, Saproo had converted to Islam and was a senior official even then. Sahajram's brother advised him not to teach Saproo's kids because he was not a good man. However, Sahajram did not accept his advice since he was the only earning member in the family, and their family was immense. He taught the kids for two to three months but received no payment. It was winter, Shivratri was approaching, and a vast expenditure was expected at home. Therefore, Sahajram asked Saproo to pay him his dues. The Minister kept on delaying, and finally Shivratri festival was near. He asked for money the day before Shivratri, but the Minister told him to come the next morning, on Shivratri day. When he went there the next morning, he was asked to arrive at 4 PM. When he went again in the evening, the Minister's family was busy with pooja. At the same time, pooja was also going on at Sahajram's home, and his family was waiting for him. He kept waiting for the pooja to end at the minister's home so that he could collect his money. When the pooja finished, the minister said he would give him money only if he ate dinner at his place. Sahajram said that he would like to eat with his family since it was the day of the festival. The Minister got angry and remained adamant. Sahajram also said angrily that he



didn't want to receive money on the conditions posed by the Minister. He left Saproo's house to join his family to celebrate the festival. Sahajram's brother told him that he had warned him that the Minister was very selfish and shameless and that if Pathan rule returned, he would not mind reverting to Islam.

Saproo felt insulted as Sahajram refused to accept the offer of having dinner at his place, and he took full advantage of his position to announce Sahajram as an anti-state. As a punishment, he was ordered to leave Kashmir and go "Peeron par"<sup>2</sup>. The Government seized all his land. This land extended from Chattabal to the current Shamshan Bhumi. The land where the high court is located currently was also a part of shamshan Bhumi. That locality is to date called "Kavuj Mohalla" (Kavuj in Kashmiri means the person who burns dead bodies). Sahajram's family was large, and he was the only earning member; therefore, he could not leave Kashmir. He cleaned his underground cow shed so he could live there in hiding. His family declared that he had already left Kashmir. He wrote books with his hands and earned a living by selling them. Subsequently, his wife got pregnant. When the time of delivery arrived, the nurse refused to help in childbirth as she assumed that her husband was away. The nurse threatened to inform the government about the same, as it was illegal to bear a child out of wedlock during those days. This forced the family to disclose the secret to the nurse. They gave her a glimpse of him but, in turn, made her promise not to tell this to anyone. This is how Amarnath's grandfather Shri Dharamchand was born. This was the punishment which his ancestors got for following their morals.

His father, Shri Sarvanand Vaishnavi, also led an honest life as a PWD employee, and because of this, he had to face many difficulties. Sarvanand was very fearless. When he was in Meerpur, one bodybuilder spit on a buffalo;

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<sup>2</sup> Term used during those days to indicate being sent outside the boundary of the state of Kashmir which was beyond Banihal.



seeing this, he got so angry that he slapped the bodybuilder. All the people watching this feared that the bodybuilder would certainly beat him, but nothing happened. Such was his courage.



Premnath Dhar



Balbadar Zutshi



Ramnath Vaishnavi

In the year 1930, a revolutionary organization was formed in Kashmir to fight for India's freedom; Amarnath's paternal uncle's son Shri Ramnath, who studied in Bisco mission school, was a member. Shri Dina Nath Nadim was also a member. The most active person was Shri Jaganath Kaul. He sent a bomb to an English resident in an envelope with a letter; the bomb exploded in the Amira Kadal post office when the postman stamped on the envelope. The postman was injured, and the furniture broke. Another bomb exploded in Sri Partap College, and the bomb was of high intensity; the



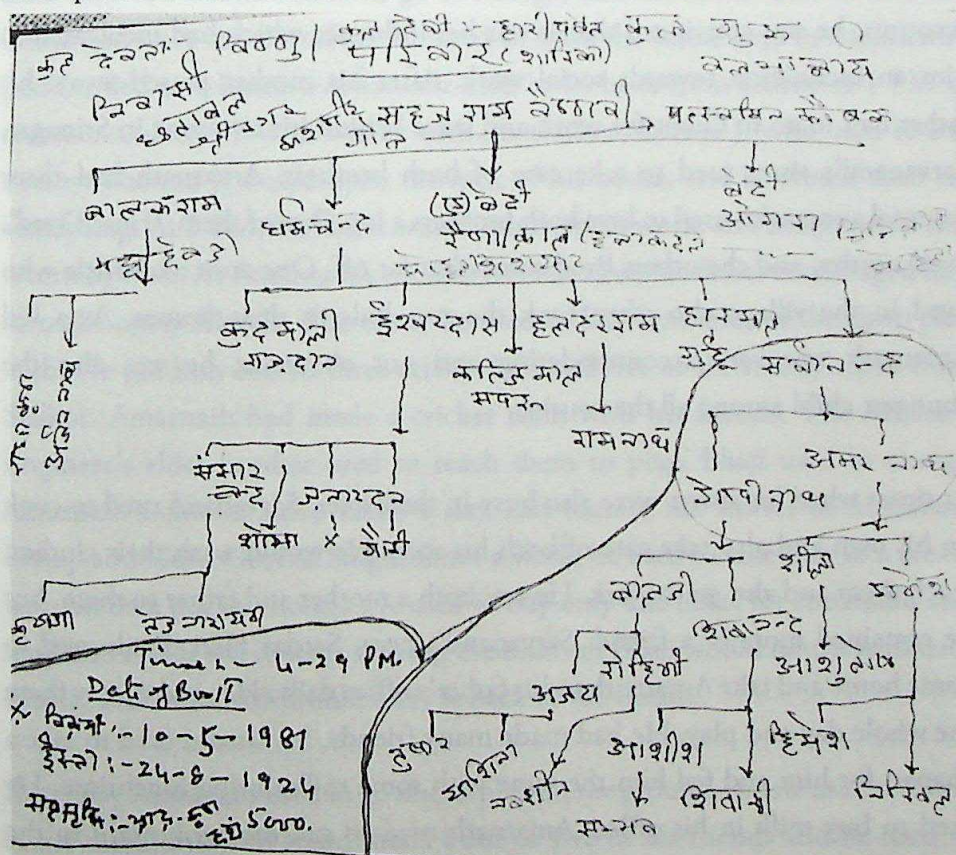
Jaganath Koul

detonated bomb was sent to Delhi for examination. One more bomb exploded in Habba Kadal. Nath Ji was arrested, however, the police could not find any evidence against him, and he was released soon. Amarnath was five years old then and had a melodious voice. He used to sing Vande Mataram and pass



letters from one person in the organization to the other. This was his first step towards social work. The other members of the organization were Shri Prem Nath Dhar, Shri Niranjana Nath Mazari and Balbadar Zutshi.

Whatever knowledge Amarnath had about history was acquired by him from his father and his elder brother Shri Gopinath whom he called Bhaji. He called him Paji (Punjabi for brother), which later transformed into Bhaji. His father was a follower of Shivaji, and Bhaji was a follower of Maharana Pratap. They always used to discuss the history of India and Hindus in particular. Bhaji used to write stories about Shivaji, Maharana Pratap and Guru Gobind Singh and asked him to read them. Bhaji started a Hindu school in Srinagar and used to teach poor children free of cost.



Family Tree drawn by Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi



## Early Childhood

Sarvanand Vaishnavi was a person of high moral values. He was honest and was against taking bribes, cheating, lying or stabbing someone's back. He was a very disciplined man who always ate self-made home food. He was a master of English Grammar and knew Persian, Sanskrit and Hindi. No one could surpass him in History and Geography. He had complete knowledge of the boundaries of the State and the country. He was a devotee of Lord Krishna, and Shivaji was his ideal. Amarnath's grandfather's paternal grandfather 'Sh Channa Sab' was a famous saint of Kashmir. Amarnath's character was deeply influenced by his father and his brother. His mother passed away when he was one and a half years old. However, after having heard about his mother's life accounts, he was convinced that it was her influence which had inculcated in him an inclination towards social work. After his mother passed away, his father had to go to Gilgit for work and leave behind his two sons in Srinagar. Sarvanand's sister used to take care of both brothers. Amarnath had three paternal aunts who used to love both brothers a lot. One of them, 'Haar Dyad', lived nearby, and the others lived somewhat far off. One aunt and uncle who lived in the village also often took the two kids to their homes. As a kid Amarnath was very accommodating and not obstinate; he was also the youngest child among all the cousins.

At times when his sisters were also busy in their lives, Sarvanand used to cook on his own and also take care of both his sons. He would wash their clothes, teach them and also go to work. He was both a mother and father to them, but he remained more of a friend. Sarvanand's peon Sardar Hari Singh used to come home and take Amarnath to his father's office daily. He used to stay there the whole day and play. He had made many friends. Sarvanand used to take a chapati for him and fed him the same with some milk during lunchtime. He used to buy milk in his office. Amarnath used to call the accountant in the office Lala Lajpat Rai since he resembled him. He gave everyone salaries at month-end, and Amarnath also demanded his pay. The accountant used to



give him ten rupees, and Amarnath was very happy. He went with his father for about a year and continued to get ten rupees every month. His father had told the accountant to give him ten rupees from his salary. Amarnath used to give this money to his father and be happy with the thought that he was also earning. After one year, his father started leaving him at his sister's place at Sathu Chandpora, which was on the way to his office. He used to pick him up on his way back.

In 1932 when Amarnath was seven years old, his father was transferred to Jammu and posted in the irrigation department. They lived in Jain Bazar at Saraja di Dhaki. He was admitted to Dhaki Government Primary School in class two. His brother used to go to college, and his father used to lock the house and leave for the office. He used to leave the home keys in Amarnath's pocket, tied to a button. Amarnath used to be back from school at 1 PM in summer and at 4 PM in winter with his teacher Sharma Ji who used to live nearby. Sharma Ji would open the lock of his house, and he would then eat something. At 5 PM, his father would return from work, and Bhaji would also return by then. As Amarnath's mother was not alive, his father encouraged him to make many friends. Therefore, he used to buy him a lot of things to play with. He got him two to three cricket bats and five or six hockey sticks from Sialkot. Amarnath had made a cricket team with his friends. The Assistant Engineer's elder brother used to teach them to play. Bhaji used to change Amarnath's clothes three times a day and narrate the stories of Maharana Pratap and Guru Govind Singh. Once a week, he used to take him to a movie with his own pocket money. He used to buy only one ticket for Amarnath and send him inside the theatre. During the interval, Bhaji would return with dahi Bhalla, and Amarnath would carry it back to the theatre.

Every day Amarnath used to go out to play on the ground. A cow used to come at the same time and stand there. Four or five of his friends and he used to make a line to drink the cow's milk the way a calf does. When the cow, whom they saw as a mother, would see that all the kids had drunk the milk, she used



to go away quietly. The first day they saw the cow, they tried to shoo her away, they even pelted small stones at her, but she did not leave. Mother Cow seemed to fill up the vacuum created in his life by his mother's absence. The cow continued to come for about one year, after which his father got government accommodation near Nehar, closer to his office, and they shifted there.

After moving there, he was admitted into the government "Pul Tawi Primary School" (Misri Wala Dharamshala) in Grade Three. As already said, he made two best friends, Mehta Gaje Singh and Vishno Datt Sharma. The latter became an MP and was also a doctor who was known as Vaid Vishno Datt. He also lived in the same government quarters. Gaje Singh's mother was very religious, but she had ill health. Every year she used to organize the Pooja of Shri Partheshwar, which was conducted by a Kashmiri Pandit whose name was Shri Janki Nath Ji Gurtoo. He was also their Guru. She used to bathe Amarnath on the day of the Pooja and give him new clothes as he was a Kashmiri Pandit. She loved him like a mother. One full moon night, Bhaji did not come back from college till late as he got engrossed in his hockey game, and his father went to Raghunath Bazar to buy groceries for the month as it was the first day of the month. He sat outside in the cold, waiting for them. Gaje Singh's father, Shri Mehta Srichand, who also worked as Jr. Engineer in the irrigation department, saw him sitting outside in the cold all alone. Amarnath told him that his father had gone to Raghunath Bazar and his brother was playing hockey in his college and that he was feeling lonely inside and therefore sat outside. Mehta Srichand was a saintly man. As he knew that Amarnath was his son's playmate, he took him inside, and they all sat around an Angithi to warm themselves. Sister Pushpa made him sit beside her, and Gaje Singh's mother was in bed. She asked him about his mother, and he said he had not seen her as she had passed away when he was very young. She felt sad to hear this and asked him if he wanted to eat something. Amarnath said that he didn't eat at anyone's place. When she asked him why, he said it was not clean. She asked what he would like to eat, and Amarnath said he could eat anything made with ghee. She asked her servant to make parathas, Dahi



Pakoda and one more vegetable. He finished the food and felt sleepy. She called him into her bed, put her quilt on him, and he slept with her just like a child sleeps with his mother.

It was a coincidence that the same day Amarnath had gone to his friend Om Prakash's house to call him to play, and he had seen his mother cuddling him, combing his hair, kissing and hugging him. Suddenly he felt the absence of his mother. However, the same night the incident mentioned above happened when Gaje Singh's mother kept him with her in her bed, the way his mother would have kept him, and he was very happy.

One day their teacher, Shri Sikander Lal, who was nearly 30 years old, asked everyone to memorize grammar; all students except Gaje Singh memorized it. The teacher allowed another day to learn the same. However, Gaje still did not learn. The teacher announced punishment for him. He asked all students in the class to slap him six times each, three on one cheek and three on the other. Thirteen or fourteen students in the class slapped him, each one six times and Gaje's face was numb, and he looked completely lost. Finally, it was Amarnath's turn to slap him. He hit him very lightly and walked away. The teacher asked him to slap with force. When Amarnath went closer to Gaje, tears started to trickle down his cheeks; he could not bear to see his condition. He told the teacher he would not slap him as he was his best friend. The teacher again asked him to slap him, and he again refused. Shri Sikander Lal lost his temper, and he threw Amarnath on the floor, started beating him with a stick, and kicked him. He beat him so much that he was unable to get up. Then another teacher intervened and asked him to stop beating him. He would have nearly beaten him to death if the other teacher had not saved him. Amarnath was picked up, made to lie on a bench, and offered water. After school, he somehow managed to walk up to the street. A Police constable, who knew them, seeing their condition, got them a rickshaw which dropped them home. After reaching home, Gaje Singh fell on his bed and became unconscious. Amarnath fell on his bed at his home. He was in pain and crying; there was no



one at home. Sister Pushpa, on seeing her brother's condition, came to Amarnath's house to enquire what had happened, but she started shouting on seeing his condition. On hearing her cries, everyone came to Amarnath's house. Sister Pushpa took him home and made him lie down on another bed. Slowly he told her the whole story. After a while, Babuji (Gaje Singh's father) took both of them to the hospital in his car. The doctor did some dressing and gave injections and a certificate of being beaten up. From the hospital, they were directly taken to the "Inspector of Schools" (Today's Deputy Director). The whole story was narrated to him, and a case was filed against Teacher Shri Sikander Lal. Asst. Inspector of schools Shri Nand Lal Kitroo was appointed for investigation. They both could not go to school for eight to ten days. After the investigation was complete, one night at about 9 PM, Shri Kitroo came with a big file and called his father and Babuji and told them that the case was so serious that the teacher could lose his job. Mr. Kitroo said that if he lost his job, his young children would have to face hunger and poverty. He asked both fathers if they could pardon him and save him from job loss; subsequently, some other punishment could be given to him. Finally, it was decided that Shri Sikander Lal's one increment would be stopped and that he would be transferred to some far-off place. Shri Sikandar was replaced by Khan Sahib, who was from Uri. Amarnath got much inspiration from him. Khan Sahib knew the Kashmiri language, and he encouraged him to speak in Kashmiri with other Kashmiri boys.

In February 1939, Sarvanand was transferred to Kashmir, and Amarnath was separated from Gaje Singh. He met him again in 1944 in Srinagar when they had come on a holiday. His mother hugged him lovingly. Sister Pushpa was married to an army officer in Kashmir. However, after giving birth to a child, Pushpa had passed away. She loved Amarnath like his elder sister. She would stitch his shirt button if it was torn, give him food and take care of him. After this meeting, he never met Gaje Singh again. He tried his best to search for him but could not find his whereabouts.

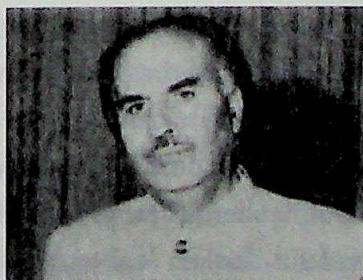


Amarnath was admitted to Babapore Middle School in Srinagar. Since his childhood, he displayed leadership qualities and a taste for art. Amarnath became the Drill commander in school, then troupe commander in scouting and later decoration in charge of the school. He became everyone's favourite. It was in this school that he developed a taste for fine arts. Kashmir's famous artist Shri Shivji Raina who was also his art teacher, encouraged him to pursue painting. There was an annual exhibition in Kashmir where scouts from different schools were on duty. He and his friends used to be on duty for their school. Scouts manned the gate and managed the discipline inside. Each scout used to get twenty-five paisa for refreshments each day. Dr Sriram was the Chief Scout Organizer. He trained scouts on multiple aspects of scouting and life in general. They learnt how to make a rope bridge and do firefighting. The scouts were called if there was a fire in the city. Maharaja Hari Singh was the Chief Scout. He used to come and meet the scouts very often. Another person who influenced him greatly was his teacher Dr. Sriram who taught him a very important life lesson- "Just relax and whistle around when life gets tough; face the difficulties of life with a smile as it gives you the courage to deal with such situations or else you will lose the battle". This is a lesson which always helped him in his life.

## School Days

### Hindu High School Was Established

In 1938, Amarnath's brother Gopinath Vaishnavi and Dina Nath Nadim, Madhusudhan Hanjura and Shri Gopi Nath Malla set up a school. Earlier, Gopinath Vaishnavi had also set up Sanatan Dharam school in Jammu. It was decided that the name of the school would be Hindu High School Srinagar. The first newspaper advertisement of the school was published with Gopinath Vaishnavi's name on it. Later a committee



Dina Nath Nadim



was formed, and admissions started. Sometime later, the education minister had to come for an inspection for the recognition of the school. There were very few students in the school, and therefore Gopinath Vaishnavi asked Amarnath to get all his friends on the day of the inspection. Gopinath Vaishnavi and D.N Nadim, founder members of the school, were present. Amarnath instructed all his friends to come to Hindu School and reach there by 10 am the next day. Everyone agreed. A false attendance register was made, and everyone's name was written on it. The director witnessed the Morning Prayer, the drill that Amarnath headed, the band was playing, and a salute was given to the director. When he came to the classes, he asked questions, which were all answered. The Inspector was quite impressed, and the school got recognition with a sanctioned strength of not more than two hundred students. Shri Madhusudan Hanjoora was the first Principal. He was very disciplined and efficient.

When Amarnath's middle school examinations were over, he told his friends they should all take admission to Hindu School. All his friends moved into Hindu school, but he joined the Government High School (now M.P Higher Secondary School). His friends were unhappy as he did not join them. He explained to them that he feared his brother Shri Gopinath Vaishnavi because he was too strict and would, therefore, not be under his supervision in school.

In 1941 after passing out of Babapore Middle School, his father got him admitted to Government Higher Secondary School, Fatehkadal. He became the Captain of the School Hockey Team, the General Drill Commander and General Traffic Controller, a member of the General Council, a member of the School Court, the General Secretary of the Decoration Committee and Commander of the School Scouts Troop. He was also the class monitor. All students looked up to him. He was influenced by the school's physical instructor Shri Mohd. Shaban, also known as Shaban Sher. He liked his smartness and agility. Mr. Shaban loved his students and would go to any extent to help them. All the teachers loved Amarnath very much. Especially



Shri Brij Lal Munshi and the Math teacher Shri Shyam Lal Madan, the Art teacher Shri Shiv Jee Raina and the Drill teacher Shri Mohd. Shaban.

He received the award of the best school decorator. During those days, a famine erupted in Bengal, and he worked hard to collect money for the famine sufferers along with Shri Kanwal Krishan Hakhoo, who was the Student In-charge. Bhaji always kept a vigil over him to check whether he was involved in any bad habits. One day he came to his school, secretly watched him and enquired from other students about his general behaviour and habits. Everyone spoke well about him except someone who lied to him that he had the habit of cigarette smoking. Bhaji came back home and ransacked his room. He checked his school bag to the extent of checking for any cigarette dust; he checked the pages of his books and notebooks, his clothes, pockets and then his fingers. When Amarnath asked why he was checking his hands, he said he was checking his general hygiene. Then he followed him for almost one week but found nothing. He was happy, he bought some sweets, and they both sat and started eating them. While eating, he asked, "Should I ask you something, and will you tell me the truth?" Amarnath was surprised and thought they had never lied to each other; then why was he distrusting him so much? He kept the sweets on the plate and asked: "Why such distrust today? What is it that makes you think that I will lie to you? Have you stopped trusting me?" Bhaji replied, "No, I do not distrust you; I was just joking", Baji said hesitantly.

Amarnath would say that some of his teachers were responsible for his well-being and good conduct. This made him remember his teacher Shri Shivjee Garyali. One day he was playing hockey in school, it was 4 PM, and the students had dispersed for the day; all the teachers and students had left except those playing hockey. Shri Garyali was a very able English teacher. He did not leave school and kept walking around on the school ground. At 5 PM, when the game was over, Amarnath returned all the game material to the Sports In-charge, picked up his books and started walking towards the gate when Shri Garyali joined him and kept his hand on his shoulder. He knew his father, as



both were classmates. He asked him about his studies etc. They reached the main road, and they had to part ways. He gently told him that he should keep his topmost shirt button open while playing to allow the air in, as he saw him sweating with his button closed. That was a very minor thing, but he spent one hour on the ground to tell him this, he recalled.

In 1943 he failed in the 10<sup>th</sup> standard due to Maths. He was a pampered child because he was the youngest, and everyone loved him because he was very social. He was also sensitive to scolding, and that upset him a lot. He would learn happily if anyone taught him playfully and lovingly, or he would not study with a strict and short-tempered tutor. Once when he was in 6<sup>th</sup> standard, Bhaji slapped him when he could not do a math sum. This hurt him since Bhaji loved him a lot, and he was not expecting this from him. Ever since he started hating Maths. He was good at Maths B, which was geometry, taught to him playfully by his father. However, he was unable to give him more time as he had to do all the household work too. There used to be much work with a young kid like him in the house. This was the reason why he remained weak in Math and failed in 10<sup>th</sup> standard. He continued to have a phobia of Math all his life. He didn't feel like looking at the questions even if he knew them and felt feverish. In 1943 he again filled up the form for the 10<sup>th</sup> examination in M P higher secondary school. In November 1943, they had a preliminary test before the final examination. When he saw Math A paper, he wrote the answer to one question, and then without seeing other questions, he wrote a note on the answer sheet:

*Respected teacher Sahib,*

*Sadar Namaskar.*

*"With due respect, I promise you that if I am allowed to appear in the final university examination, I will pass your subject at any cost. I may fail in any other subject, but not in your subject, mathematics.*

*It is a pucca (sure) promise."*



Examinations were over, and after two days, his math teacher Mr Shyam Lal Madan, entered the class. He was a great teacher who taught playfully and never beat up the children. He brought with him answer sheets to give feedback to all the students. The first answer sheet was Amarnath's, as his roll number was one, and he was also the class monitor. With a smile, he picked up his answer sheet and told everyone, "This is the answer sheet of your friend Vaishnavi. It is a special answer sheet with a note." On hearing this, Amarnath felt ashamed and bent his head down. Other students were astonished and asked the teacher what was so special about that answer sheet. The teacher said, "This is his answer sheet, he has solved only one question, and the rest of the answer sheet is crossed, and he has also written a note." Then he read out the note to everyone and said, "Vaishnavi, isn't this yours?" Amarnath nodded his head in affirmation, looking down. Then the teacher came to him and asked him, "Vaishnavi will you stand by your promise?" Amarnath confidently said, "Yes, Sir, this is my promise, and I will stand by it." The teacher patted his back and said: "I trust you, so I will allow you to appear in the final examination." All his friends were happy as they loved him and hugged him after class. He was loved by all, from the principal to the game's coolie of the school.

The Principal, Shri Radha Krishan Kaul, was one of the first three graduates of J&K State. There were eight sections in the 10<sup>th</sup> standard, and he taught English once a week in each. He taught amicably and encouraged all to do their best. Students had great respect for him. The next day he called Amarnath into his room, and Amarnath got worried about why he was called. He went to his room with his heart sinking, wondering if he had made any mistake. The principal loved him, but he was strict too. The principal held his walking stick with his right hand, and Amarnath was scared to see that. Then, he kept his hand on his shoulder and smiled. Amarnath heaved a sigh of relief. Then the principal asked him about the note in his answer sheet, enquiring if that was true, and Amarnath nodded in affirmation. He asked him why he attempted only one question. He told him that he had some aversion towards Math. The



principal asked him whether he was fully aware of what he had written and whether he was confident that he would fulfil the promise. Amarnath assured him that he would stand by his promise. Then the principal also assured him that he would be allowed to sit in the examination.

His Matriculation examination was scheduled in 1944 after the winter break of two and a half months, starting on 15<sup>th</sup> Dec 1943. The examination centre was in the famous Mission School located near Fateh Kadal. Now the time had come when he had to fulfil the promise that he had made to his Maths teacher. He shut all his books except Math in a cupboard. He asked Bhaji to arrange a tutor for him. The tutor taught him for a month, but Amarnath was the same; he could not learn anything. The tutor was also annoyed, and they asked him to leave. Bhaji was worried, and Amarnath was anxious. Bhaji asked him what could be done, that too when he had given up studying other subjects. But Amarnath told him that he had no worries about other subjects. He said that he had made a promise and could not afford to break the same; he could not save his face if he failed to fulfil the promise. Amarnath said that he would not forgive himself if he failed. Bhaji was worried; he even thought that Amarnath might commit suicide. Then Amarnath told him that the only way to make him do well was by hurting his self-esteem and breaking his heart, which would force him to prove himself. Bhaji started laughing and said, "How will the heart break?" They both laughed, and then he said that he had complete faith in God, who would certainly find some way. That day, Bhaji took Amarnath out for a movie, and they had lunch. Four to five days passed, and Bhaji started teaching Amarnath. Though Amarnath was anxious about his examination, he had forgotten their discussion a few days back regarding the heartbreak.

On the fifth day, when Bhaji was teaching Amarnath, there was a sudden change in his behaviour, and he started shouting at Amarnath and said that he was worthless since he knew nothing about studies; he called him dumb with no brains. He said he would someday bring a blot to the family's reputation and was a liability. He even slapped him and threw the notebook in his face.



Bhaji said that all the money was being spent on him in vain and that he was too pampered to be good. Amarnath was in a state of shock; he had never seen his brother behave this way before. He felt deeply insulted and hurt and felt like committing suicide. He wept and kept on crying the whole night. No one came to console him or even asked him to have dinner. His father was quiet, and his paternal aunt, who would typically never let him stay hungry, also did not show up. At 5 AM, he, as usual, went to the bank of the river Jhelum and thought of committing suicide by jumping into the water. He sat there for about an hour, weeping and thinking about what to do. He tried washing his face, but the tears did not stop. He had never heard such words about himself before. Then suddenly, his tears stopped, and he felt self-confident. He folded his hands before God, applied tilak on his forehead and went home happily. Bhaji saw him happy, and he looked confident. He asked him to have tea. He did not discuss anything about whatever had happened the previous night. After having tea, Amarnath got hold of his books and sat down to study. Bhaji came upstairs to see him and was happy to see him study. Bhaji again started teaching him, and they solved questions. Everything had changed now. Bhaji had got Paneer and Curd, and they had lunch in the afternoon. They all were happy again. Now Bhaji was convinced that his insults for him had worked. Lovingly, he asked Amarnath, "How are you now?" Amarnath replied, "If you had not broken my heart, I would not have transformed. But how could you change suddenly and be so harsh towards me when I had not made any mistake? This was strange; I could not understand how and why you lost your temper. What happened? Were you in a bad mood that you hurt me so much that I even contemplated suicide?" Then Bhaji reminded him of their conversation a few days back when Amarnath said that only a blow to his self-esteem could transform him. Then smiling, he said, "Wasn't it a good drama? I just fulfilled your desire". Amarnath winked at him and thanked him. Now he was sure that God would help him in fulfilling the promise that he had made to his teacher. He complained to Bhabhi (Sister-in-law) that even she didn't ask him to have dinner that night. Bhabhi told him that no one had



dinner that night. She said, "When your brother did not eat dinner, how could the rest of us eat?"

Now, all was going fine with him. He had studied Math and no other subject. He used to play every day, and he had formed a cricket club and hockey club with his friends, and they never lost a game. They also used to do archery. His friend Shyam Lal Dhar Bahar was an expert archer. Finally, the examination date sheet came. The first paper was that of English. Bhaji saw his paper and said that he had done well. Likewise, he gave more exams and did well. Finally came the day of the Math A examination. Everyone was worried at home and sent him off with their blessings. His father came down to the examination hall. Before entering the examination hall, he chatted with friends, and essential questions were discussed. Finally, the question paper was distributed, and there was silence in the hall. He completed the first question, second question and also the third question. He knew that he had solved them correctly. He could have solved the rest of the paper too. However, he was so happy and excited that he did not read the rest of the paper. He was confident about his Math B, in which he was expecting at least seventy-five per cent marks, and he thought that three questions in Math A were sufficient for him to pass the paper and the overall percentage would be taken care of by Math B. He was the first to return his answer sheet in an hour, and everyone was surprised to see this. He gestured to his friends to meet him outside after their examination. He was happy that he had done well in English too, which was a compulsory subject. However, he was somewhat doubtful about Geography and General Knowledge since he did not study these subjects much due to his focus on Math.

Afterwards, his friends also came out of the examination hall. He took them all to the school, where they asked their Games In-charge, Shri Lassa Bhat, to give them hockey sticks. They played hockey till 4 PM. As he did not reach home on time, his entire family was anxious. Bhaji, Bhabhi, Cousin Sabaji (Saba Toth), and his father looked for him. His father immediately went to



Fateh Kadal and asked the boatmen whether any boy had jumped into the water. Then, he went to the bus stand to find out if he had gone to Jammu. They suspected he would have committed suicide or run away because of his bad performance in the Math exam. They could not find his whereabouts. They asked a few other students about him, who told them he had left the examination hall very early. This confirmed their doubt; however, the students also said that Amarnath looked happy. Amarnath and his friends were very tired, and at 4 pm, they returned the hockey sticks and set off for their respective homes. His coat was on his shoulder, and his face was red and sweating while walking home. When Saba Toth saw him, looking at his condition, he could see that he was fine. He hugged him. Amarnath told him that he did well in examinations and was tired after playing and asked him if he could buy something to eat from the nearby sweet shop. He was happy to know that Amba (as they called him at home) was fine, and he bought him milk. Amarnath tried telling him to see his question paper, but he did not pay attention to it and said: "Let's go home first; everyone is waiting for you." Their house was about ten minutes from there. When he reached home, everyone was happy to see him. When he asked them to see his paper, they insisted he eat something first. Everyone wanted to see him in a good mood. He ate food along with curd and lassi, and then they insisted that he should get some sleep. They did not even let him sit. They suspected that he had not done well in the examination and therefore avoided the topic altogether so that he did not take an extreme step. On the contrary, Amarnath was eager to narrate his experience to them. He finally slept as he was tired too. In the evening, he described the whole story to Bhaji. Bhaji asked why he did not attempt the rest of the paper. He told him that he was too happy to think and quite satisfied that he could manage to pass and fulfil the promise that he had made to his teacher.

His Math teacher Shri Shyamlal Madan had been transferred to Muzaffarabad. Muzaffarabad schools used to have summer break, not winter break, as in Kashmir. The result was soon to be declared. Everyone in the family was worried about his result. Bhaji, Uncle, and Sabaji all tried to keep him happy.



Shri Shyamlal Ji was also eagerly awaiting the result in Muzaffarabad, as were Amarnath's friends, who were eager to see his performance. Finally, the day of the result came, and his father returned from Gulmarg. Bhaji went to see his result and did not allow him to go. Results used to be announced on Habba Kadal. Shri Kewal Krishan Hakku from Punjab University announced the result to anyone who paid 50 paise. They used to carry a loudspeaker made of tin and announce the result through the same. He was confident that he would pass. Bhaji came back with the result published in the Urdu Martand newspaper. He had passed, and he was happy that he had fulfilled his promise. Shri Shyamlal Madan Ji also saw his result in Muzaffarabad. Next Sunday, he reached Srinagar and came to his house. He had come from Muzaffarabad just to meet him. Amarnath was called downstairs, and Shyamlal Ji hugged and kissed his forehead. Shyamlal Ji had tears in his eyes. Later when Amarnath was a teacher in Handwara in 1956, Shri Shyamlal Ji was the principal of the same school.

After he passed the Matriculation examination in 1944, Bhaji got a form from SP College for his entry into Degree College. He filled up the form and went with his friends to submit the same. Later they decided to pay a visit to Amar Singh Technical Institute. Shri Shivjee Raina, who was a renowned artist and Art teacher, who was also his teacher in school, was working with this Institute. Amarnath had also practiced art with him at his residence and was very good at drawing in his school. This institute had the best teachers, like the world-renowned Bengali teacher Shri Jyotish Mukherjee, Shri Satlal Kampassi, a well-known landscape and figure artist, and Shri Nath Mattoo, an excellent designer and letter writer during the British empire. He got admission to the Institute. Shri Shivjee Raina introduced Amarnath as a budding artist of the future, and they insisted he should fill up the form. Shri Shivjee asked him to draw the painting of a book with a kettle on it, which he placed on a table. He made a beautiful painting; after all, he was his disciple. He received a scholarship of Rs 10 per month. He was happy to get the admission as he had a strong passion for art. The Institute provided all the material required; nothing was to be



purchased. Maharaja Hari Singh provided everything free to the students. This Institute had an international reputation. They were a class of six students in the first year. Hansraj was from Sambha, Manohar Kotwal was from Kishtwar, one was from Ladakh, and one more was a Kashmiri Muslim. After the third year, all those who came from the outside left, and only two remained in the valley.

## Joining RSS

Amarnath Vaishnavi joined RSS in 1945 in Srinagar. There is an interesting story of how he got associated with RSS. It was June 1945, and he used to go to the market early in the morning to buy milk. One day, he was walking on the street and saw his distant relative, Shri Arjan Nath Dhar. Arjan Nath was wearing shorts and had a rubber ring in his hand, he looked different, and his behaviour seemed to have improved, but Amarnath was not sure of it. Arjan Nath said that they played everyday morning in Sheetalnath, and he invited him to join them. He said that he could join the next day. Amarnath replied in the affirmative and walked away, but in his heart, he had decided not to go. Arjan Nath came to his house the next day, met his father and told him about it. His father asked Arjan Nath, fondly called Veer Ji by friends, to wait and then sent Amarnath with him. That day Amarnath went to Sheetalnath. He was surprised to see the discipline there. The place was full of all good people; he knew many of them, and they were his friends. He met Makhan Lal Aima, who also studied at Babapora Middle School. On the first day, he got introduced to everyone, and they played together. That day he understood that Arjan was not the same old Arjan anymore. He had transformed from Bilwa Mangal to Soordas. It was God's design to make Dr Hedgewar set up RSS. Amarnath would not have fitted in any other organization as best as he did in the Sangh; that is what he believed. On the first day, he heard this song from Makhan Lal Aima for the first time "O AAne Wale Soch Samajh Ke Sangh Aana, Yahan to Kewal Dukh Hi Dukh Hai." (Come here only after giving it a thought because there is only misery here). This was the second-best song of



his life. The first one was “Vande Mataram”, which he first heard in 1931. Amarnath was grateful to Veer Ji for bringing him closer to RSS. He used to say that the reason behind his good health was his father, his brother and his ancestral heritage, and the Sangh took further care of him with its clean habits and lifestyle.

From 1945 he regularly went to the Shakha. Around the same time, he joined an organization called “Hindu Sewa Sangh”, which was just set up in Srinagar. Through this organization, he started Hindi classes. They also had a library. Most of the Hindi, English and Urdu Newspapers were kept there. Around 200 girls and boys used to come every day to read Hindi. Bhagwat Gita classes were also conducted. Hindu Sewa Sangh gave him a scholarship of six rupees every month. They conducted some tests for which the certificates came from Delhi. He completed his three-year diploma in Fine Arts in 1947. The examinations were conducted by “City & Guilds”, London. The Institute had to send the candidate’s practical work in parcels to London for evaluation, and it used to bear all the expenses. After completing the course in Fine Arts, he completed a Diploma in Interior Decoration in two years instead of three years, as he got a waiver of one year for completing the three-year diploma in Fine Arts.

In 1947, a new RSS office was inaugurated in Lahore in Krishna Nagar. Those who went to attend the inaugural ceremony from Kashmir were Balraj Madhok, Makhan Lal Aima, Omkar Nath Mahu and Amarnath himself. They went via Rawalpindi, where he first met Madhavrao Sadashiv Rao Golwalkar, fondly known as Guruji. In the same year, in August, Guruji visited Kashmir. He was staying at “Diwano ki Kothi.” Pandit Amarnath was the Senior Shikshak in Sheetalnath Shakha. He was in charge of his security. While Guruji was in the Kothi, one of the Swayamsewaks got a high fever that night. Guruji somehow learned about it and went to the Swayamsevak’s room; he was worried and asked them to arrange tea for the sick Swayamsewak. Guruji stayed there till the Swayamsevak took the medicine and drank the tea.



The rank and file of the RSS of the state, particularly in Kashmir province, had to face tough times during the years from 1947 to 1962 while fighting against its opponents, namely Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, National Conference government headed by Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, the congressmen and democratic National Conference leaders which included Ram Pyara Saraf, Krishan Dev Sethi, DP Dhar, Syed Mir Qasim, Ghulam Mohammad Sadiq and others. With their cadre-based



Janki Nath Jagyasoo

organizations, these leaders were determined to stop RSS from advancing in the state. Anyway, the RSS in Kashmir resisted its opponents' moves with courage and strengthened its mass base in the Valley. Shri Janki Nath Koul Jagyasoo was instrumental in starting the first RSS Shakha in Srinagar in 1942 under the guidance of Prof. Balraj Madhok. Shri Jagyasoo had come from Sialkot, where he had to spend some time and was in close contact with RSS Pracharaks of the area. The history of RSS in Kashmir will be incomplete without naming Dwarika Nath Saproo, Padmashri Prof. Chaman Lal Saproo, Niranjana Nath Raina, Dr Pran Nath Trisal, Padamshri Moti Lal Qemu, Dr Shashi Shekhar Toshkhani, Swaroop Narayan Peshin, Roop Krishan Peshin, Omkar Kachroo, and Nirmal Kusum Kachroo. They all had the responsibility of contacting the members of the society to broaden the network of RSS in Kashmir in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Nirmal Kusum Kachroo made inroads into the women folk of the Hindu society along with other women activists. The women's wing of the RSS was named Rashtriya Swayam Sevik Sangh. One of the leading Advocates of Kashmiri Pandits, Sudershan Dharmarthi, served as the patron of RSS in Kashmir for about two years right since 1950. Professor Balraj Madhok was then a Professor of History at DAV College, Srinagar. It goes to the credit of Professor Balraj Madhok for spreading the network of RSS Shakhnas throughout the Kashmir Valley and uniting Kashmiri Pandit Boys under the banner of patriotism in a 'hate India'



atmosphere. In 1946 Pandit Omkar Nath Kak, Avtar Krishan Kaw and Pandit Makhan Lal Aima became Pracharaks (preachers) and moved from village to village to attain the goal of achieving the unity of patriotic forces. Till 1947 Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, Pandit Tika Lal Tapiloo, Pandit Jagan Nath Mathura, Pandit Janki Nath Dhobi, Pandit Omkar Nath Koul, Pandit Balkrishan Kachroo, Pandit Triloki Nath Dhobi, Pandit Jia Lal Koul, Pandit Dina Nath Zutshi, Pandit Som Nath Ogra, and Pandit MN Koul had attained the status of senior functionaries of RSS in the valley. This group became prominent when its working mechanism successfully arranged RSS security cover against Pakistani aggression in 1947. The standby guards of Maharaja Hari Singh had volunteered to cater to the needs of Hindu and Sikh refugees who had come to the streets because of loot, plunder and killings executed by the Pakistani raiders. Pandit Makhan Lal Aima, Pandit Omkar Nath Kak and Pandit Autar Krishen Kaw were put in charge of the Shakhas of Srinagar district, Anantnag district and Baramulla district, respectively.

Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi was engaged throughout his life in developing mass contacts with every member of the society in which he lived. His purpose in life was to address the problems of the needy and make them feel that they would not be left alone in times of crisis. He was clear in his mind that the unity of different castes of the Hindus could play a pivotal role in uniting the country as a whole. It was his dream to see Hindus as a caste-free society. He was an embodiment of humility and humanity, simplicity, serenity, patience and piety. These are the qualities of a missionary, which he was. He always remained eternally youthful by his remarkable ability to live in the present. He was inspired by Shriya Bhatt and Pandit Hargopal Koul, the "Lion of Kashmir", which he would be called in his lifetime for his contribution to the survival of the Kashmiri Pandit Community. Amarnath, as a dedicated Swayam Sevak, including all those mentioned above and others, namely Moti Lal Zadoo, Madan Lal Khushoo and Pran Nath Mia, would maintain vigil during the nights to safeguard the community members from the raiders in their respective localities in 1947.



## Marrying Smt. Lakshmishwari Kachroo

In 1956 his father bought a house at Chattabal in Srinagar City, and the family shifted from Shashyar Mohalla, Habba Kadal, to Chattabal. Sarvanand's health



Family Photo

was deteriorating. He called Amarnath and his brother and told them that his death was near. After six months, he passed away. After a few months, when Amarnath came to Srinagar from Handwara, his brother asked him to go with him for a walk at five in the evening. They reached the Shamshan

Bhumi in Karan Nagar and sat under a

Chinar tree. Amarnath was quiet for some time, and then he saw tears in his brother's eyes. When he asked him the reason for his tears, his brother said that all the relatives thought that he was not interested in getting him married, and he requested him to marry. Amarnath was not interested in marrying as he wanted to spend his life in social service. Seeing his brother in that state, he agreed to marry, but under one condition, the girl should be poor and an orphan. They found one such girl whose parents had died when she was young, and she was cared for by her maternal aunt. They did not enquire much about the girl, and he married her. However, after the marriage, they found that she was ill. After six months of marriage, due to her inability to manage herself, the fingers of her right hand got burnt. All relatives and friends told him to give her monthly alimony and remarry. He did not favour remarriage as he worshipped Lord Rama, who believed in single marriage. Secondly, he had married to fulfil his brother's wish and not for himself.



On 15th August 1959, an incident occurred which made him reflect on his life as a married man. This day was a holiday, and all outstation teachers visited their homes. However, he chose to stay back as he had organized the Independence Day celebrations. He woke up at 5 AM and prepared his breakfast. He prepared rice for lunch and kept some flour for making chapatis for tea time. The Local MLA, the chief guest of the function, reached late, and the function did not end on time. As a result, he reached home at 3 PM instead of 1 PM, which was the usual lunchtime.



With his wife Smt Lakshmeshwari

When he lifted the pan filled with rice, it fell on his shoes, and he was disappointed. He decided to make some chapatis, ate them with some vegetables, and drank tea as it was tea time. Then he sat on his bed and started thinking of what use his marriage was if he had to live this kind of life. He fell asleep while he was thinking. Amarnath ji was a spiritual man; once in a while, he got certain insights through his dreams. Some of them used to turn out right, and sometimes he used to get unexpected help in his dreams. For example, once he had prolonged knee pain while he lived in Jammu in the early 2000s. He had tried several doctors and treatments, but there was no respite. One day he saw someone who gave him a phone number in his dream and asked him to call on that number. He mentioned this to Shri Hriday Nath Raina, who lived in the same house as him. He remembered the phone number, and Raina ji called on that number. To their surprise, the phone number was that of an orthopaedic doctor based in Kashmir. The doctor suggested him a treatment over the phone, and the same treatment cured his knee pain. On this day also he found himself sleepy, and he had a dream; he felt as if he was watching it with his eyes wide open. He could not differentiate whether he was sleeping or he was awake. In this dream, he got the answer to



his question about his married life, which was incomplete due to his wife's illness. Following was his dream.

In his previous incarnation, he was a wrestler who lived in a place situated somewhere between Pathankot and Kathua. There was a wrestling competition in Punjab or Jammu where wrestlers had come from many places, and he was one of them. Each wrestler was also accompanied by their own followers. The competition started, and he was one of two winners in the end. A tough fight started between the two. He lifted the other wrestler by his leg and neck and threw him on the floor, and the wrestler died. People cheered and applauded him, not knowing that the wrestler on the ground was dead. The dead wrestler was married and had two sons and a daughter; Amarnath was also married. The dead wrestler's sons held vengeance against Amarnath as they thought he had smothered their father to death. They were wrestlers, too, and they attacked him several times. He became wary of these attacks and decided to teach them a lesson one day. He went to their home, where he found their sister filling water under a tap outside the house; he could not find the two brothers. He lifted this girl on his shoulders and took her away. She shouted and tried to free herself, but she was powerless in front of his strength. He brought her to his wrestling shed and asked his juniors to lock her in one room. He also asked them to give her food from time to time and treat her well and not misbehave with her in any way until he returned at 5 PM. When he returned in the evening, he found the girl sleeping. He took her back to her home. When her brothers saw her, they accused her of being in love with someone they thought was their father's killer. She tried to explain that she was innocent and helpless, but they threw her out of the house after beating her up. She sat outside her home without food for many days. After a few days, she walked away till she fainted near a brothel. The woman who managed the brothel found her and brought her inside. She was amazed to see such a beautiful girl. She gave her food and made her wear nice clothes. The girl fell asleep as she had eaten after three days. Then she took dance lessons and became a famous prostitute. Men used to line up for her. The old woman died,



and this girl started managing the brothel; she also grew old and died. In her present incarnation, she returned as Lakshmishwari, his wife, and suffered from many diseases. In the same dream, some unknown person stood before Amarnath and said all this was an outcome of her bad deeds as a prostitute in her previous incarnation. He also told Amarnath, "Aren't you responsible for this condition of hers? Had you not kidnapped her, she would not have landed up in a brothel." In his dream, Pandit Amarnath told the unknown person that he wanted to pay for the deeds of his previous incarnation in his present incarnation itself and that he wished to seek forgiveness from God. The old woman who managed the brothel was her aunt in her present incarnation, who had to bear her burden till she was alive. Lakshmishwari had two brothers, but she never lived with them. Amarnath was not unhappy with his brother for choosing this girl as his wife because, according to him, this was his punishment for his bad deeds in his previous life. Smt. Lakshmishwari died in April 1960.

Having had an insight into his past Karma, he was desirous of attaining Nirvana (freedom from the cycle of rebirth) through good Karma.



## Chapter – 3

### Grooming as a Leader

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#### The Spiritual self

**T**rika and Vedanta both are essentially non-dualistic, grounded in monism, and both uphold man's innate divinity. Kashmir Shaivism analyses reality into 36 Tattvas employing the concept of I-ness and This-ness. The Sufis of Kashmir also talk about the I-ness and This-ness, and Shiva as inseparable from Shakti. Thus, I-ness and This-ness form one-ness. Shaivism is the philosophy of choice for an average Kashmiri Pandit, but he is in no way away from the cult of Vaishnavites. There are three main sects in Hinduism. These are Vaishnavas, the Shaivites and the Shaktas. If one is Vaishnava, Vishnu is their Sagun Brahman. If one is a Shaivite, Shiva is their Sagun Brahman. If one is a Shakta, Shakti is their Sagun Brahman. Kashmiris are worshipers of both Shiva and Shakti. They worship Vishnu also. Lord Rama and Lord Krishna are both considered incarnations of Vishnu, and thus Kashmiri Pandits worship both Lord Krishna and Lord Rama. Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi was inherently a Vaishnavite who would love to worship Vishnu or its incarnations, Lord Krishna and Lord Rama. He also loved children and would address each child in his vicinity or his family by the name of 'Kanahiya'. He would hug the little children treating them as little Krishnas. He would advise everyone around him to chant a Mantra "Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna Harey Harey, Harey Rama, Harey Rama, Rama Rama Harey Harey." He firmly believed that faith of this kind would eradicate all troubles, and the above-



quoted Mantra, when recited with faith, could pave the way for salvation. Sometimes he was also a spiritual guide for the people in his close association. He was a music lover, too and as an artist, he would paint the architectural remains of Kashmir.

A renowned physicist, John Eccles, said, "I want you to realize that there is no colour to the natural world and no sound, nothing of this kind, no textures, no patterns, no beauty, no scent." This means that our senses interpret raw data and create a world of forms, colours etc. The observer bestows meaning and traits on the cosmos, otherwise, the universe would be pure potential. This view of the universe is, in a way, linked with the oneness of God. Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi often engaged his associates and family members in spiritual discussions and would often say, "The cosmos is an integral whole, its ultimate reality is common to all, irrespective of religion, caste, region, creed, race and nationality." True, it was that he was a staunch nationalist, but his patriotism would never debar him from being a humanist. He would often say that a self-realized person does not brood over the past; neither does he take failures to heart. He acts and leaves the outcome to God. Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi was an enlightened personality endowed with the spirit of love and unity and would consider everyone sacred and worthy of respect. He had rejected the materialistic lifestyle.

### Legacy Inherited

Pandit Vaishnavi had great reverence for the martyrs of J&K State, about whom he would always make an explicit mention. They are Brigadier Rajinder Singh, Maqbool Sherwani, Master Abdul Aziz and Major Somnath. He would consider them the saviours of Kashmir. They had laid down their lives in 1947 in the Pakistani raid.

Brigadier Rajinder Singh attained his martyrdom at Buniyar near Baramulla on October 27, 1947, while defending Kashmir by stopping the advancement of the raiders towards Srinagar. Brig. Rajinder Singh was the first Indian soldier



to be honoured with the second-highest gallantry award of Mahavir Chakra. Another brave heart who contributed his might in this direction was Major Somnath Sharma. He had a fractured arm from the wrist to the elbow when he landed at Srinagar, where the situation was fast deteriorating. It was on October 27, 1947, when the Indian Army landed at Srinagar Airport, which was made worthy for landing by hundreds of civilian volunteers, including the RSS youth, amongst whom was Amarnath. This was because the airport, till that time, had become unsuitable for landing.

Major Sharma and his company were dispatched to Budgam, he had limited forces compared to the enemy, and he had to save the Srinagar Airfield. The enemy was only 50 yards away from him, and there was a devastating fire around his troops when he sent a message to the Head Quarters requesting reinforcements. He fought till the end, and the brave son of the country fell to mortar fire from the enemy, but he saved the Airfield. His body was traced after three days on October 30, 1947. On their arrival in Baramulla, the Pakistani Raiders looted and killed hundreds of Sikhs and Hindus and burnt their houses with the help of the residents. However, the native neighbours of Hindus and Sikhs gave shelter to those whose houses were burnt.

On October 26, 1947, Maqbool Sherwani, a shopkeeper of Baramulla, rode his motorcycle and went around the town, telling raiders of Pakistan not to advance towards Srinagar as Indian troops had reached the outskirts of Baramulla. This information was false, and he spread it to immobilize the raiders for four days, by which time the Indian Army landed at Srinagar. He thus put the raiders on the wrong track from Baramulla to halt their advance so that the Indian troops could liberate the fallen areas from the enemy. Later, the raiders learned about his lie, which led to his brutal murder by them. Master Abdul Aziz and Shri Pushkarnath Zadoo, who were both teachers from Srinagar posted at Baramulla, also attained martyrdom when they followed Maqbool Sherwani's path by preventing the Pakistani raiders in their onward march to Srinagar. These martyrs were equally revered by Amarnath Vaishnavi.



## Accession of Kashmir

The Accession of Kashmir to the Indian state had started with high tension and had an amazing end, no doubt on a positive note. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister of India, was hesitant at the very outset to receive the Instrument of Accession simply because it had come to him from Maharaja Hari Singh and not from Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, who was then appointed the Administrator of the State temporarily by the Maharaja's Government. This was revealed by Shri Mehar Chand Mahajan, the outgoing Prime Minister of the State of J&K during the Maharaja's regime. In his book "Looking Back", he stated that he and Shri V.P. Menon, then Secretary of State in the Home Ministry, Government of India, presented the document of Instrument of Accession duly signed by Maharaja Hari Singh to the Prime Minister of India in New Delhi, which was earlier handed over to them by the Maharaja for its onwards submission to the Prime Minister. While going through this signed document, Pandit Nehru got upset and said, "Oh, it should have come from Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah". Mehar Chand Mahajan has further written in his book that within no time, a gentleman entered the room with a slip in his hand which he handed over to the Prime Minister and instantly disappeared. Prime Minister then smiled when he went through the slip and said, "Oh, Sheikh Sahib has communicated his consent."

The document was well received by the Prime Minister after that. Shri Mehar Chand Mahajan has further stated that he and V.P. Menon later learnt that Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah was in the room adjacent to the room where they were conversing with the Prime Minister. Sheikh Sahib had thus heard every bit of conversation that had transpired between them. On that account, Sheikh Sahib responded to the Prime Minister's remark and sent a slip to him through his attendant.



## 1947 The Landing of Indian Troops in Srinagar & Nehru's Speech at Lalchowk

When Indian troops landed in Srinagar on 27<sup>th</sup> October, National Conference workers headed by Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad provided them with vehicles and vital information about the Pakistani raiders. Brigadier L P Sen, who commanded the troops, has acknowledged their contribution in his book "Slender Was the Thread". On 4<sup>th</sup> November 1947, Sardar Patel and Defense Minister Sardar Baldev Singh arrived in the valley to have an on-the-spot assessment. They rushed to Brigadier L P Sen's headquarters to learn about the military operation that had been launched in the wee hours on October 27. Brigadier Sen apprised them of the situation and sought additional troops and artillery, which was promised and sent within a couple of days.

Amarnath Vaishnavi, being an active RSS worker who was involved in preserving and maintaining the airport of Srinagar as a volunteer, recollected that the head of the emergency government, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah and his deputy Ghulam Mohd Bakshi accompanied Sardar Patel and Sardar Baldev Singh to the Airport to see them off. According to Dr. Kashinath Pandita in his article, "On their way to Srinagar, they decided to visit the Brigadier's headquarters. They were received by Major Kak, who was the Liaison Officer. Both were taken to the operation room, where Major Kak explained things. Brigadier Sen was busy on a wireless set and had no idea of the important meeting in the operation room. He was furious when he saw two unknown civilians. He did not ask them who they were but ordered them to leave the room immediately and not to set their feet in again. Immediately when they left, Major Kak told him who they were." Brigadier Suchet Singh, who was a witness to this event, told me in his interview recently that Vaishnavi Ji was a nationalist to the core; during the 1947 tribal invasion in Kashmir, he took part in the preparation of a makeshift runway at Damodhar airport in Srinagar to help the Indian army.





Sheikh Abdullah & Nehru at Historic Lalchowk in Srinagar

Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi often mentioned the two events where Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, the then Prime minister of India, had erred. Pandit Nehru, in a public speech at the historical Lal Chowk of Srinagar, sharing the dais with Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, then Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir in 1947, said that the people of the state would decide the fate of Jammu and Kashmir by holding a plebiscite. The political Pandits of those days commented that even Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah was taken by surprise when Pandit Nehru said so. However, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah took cognisance of the nod and launched a movement demanding a plebiscite in the following years. The other event was when against the wishes of the Cabinet Colleagues, Nehru went running to the U.N. Security Council as per the wish of Sheikh Abdullah after the 1947 Pakistan raid without even consulting the Parliament to complain against Pakistan's aggression towards India. This has proved beyond any doubt that India, particularly the Hindus of Kashmir, are reaping the whirlwind that had blown from New Delhi, where Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was at the helm of affairs.

Amarnath Vaishnavi had deep insight into Indian history in general and the history of Kashmir in particular. He was aware of the blunders committed by



the Hindu rulers from time to time on the national scene and the local level in his native state. Going through the pages of the Indian history of the days of freedom struggle, he would always admire the revolutionary group. The names of Bhagat Singh, Raj Guru, Sukhdev, Ram Prashad Bismil, Chandrashekhar Azad, Ashfaqullah, Batukeshwar Dutt and others were always on his lips. He was inspired by the slogan of Lokmanya Tilak, "Freedom is my birthright, and I shall have it." On the contrary, he considered Gopal Krishna Gokhale's narration that we, the Indians, must first deserve to be free, and then we must seek freedom as a total surrender before the British. According to him, the three main icons of the freedom struggle movement, other than the revolutionaries of the times, were Lala Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal. He revered both Aurobindo Ghosh and Mahatma Gandhi. He would often say that the patriotic fervour of Aurobindo and Satyagraha, propounded by the Father of the Nation, were the tools to achieve socio-political and economic freedom. He had imbibed the mixed qualities of a revolutionary and a non-violent Satyagrahi. In his lifelong struggle against the discriminatory attitudes of the authorities and the anti-patriotic forces, he, along with Tika Lal Tapiloo, a veteran leader of his times, would come onto the roads while chanting Bankim Chandra Chatterji's 'Vande Mataram' and would sit on hunger strike to raise their voice against the ill doings of the authorities and agencies concerned.

He would end his morning prayer by reciting the full text of Vande Mataram. It was his dream to see India united. He would often recite one line, "EK HREDAY HO BHARAT JANANI" (Let the sons and daughters of Mother India speak with one voice.)

Swami Vivekananda's address to the distinguished dignitaries at Chicago in America on 11.9.1893 had made a tremendous impact on Vaishnavi Ji's personality. He often said that Swamiji's address proved to be a tumultuous beginning of his tryst with cohesive and forward American society. The opening remarks by Swamiji in his maiden address won him rich accolades with full publicity on the international scene when he said "brothers and



sisters” in his starting note. He spoke on Vedanta lines and stressed the unity of the mind, body and soul. Swamiji’s call to reach the poorest of the poor to eradicate poverty and caste bias in society had impressed Vaishnavi Ji to such an extent that he would silently and secretly pay the needy around him from his pension money.

However, Amarnath was equally pained to notice the crisis through which India was passing in the 21st century. He would say, “India today is faced with rampant corruption, poverty, internal and external terror and economic failure. Congress ruled the country for most of the time after independence. Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, overlooked corruption and the security scenario of the country for long.” He would repeatedly count the decisions taken by Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru as detrimental to the interest of the country. One such decision of the Prime Minister of India, according to him, was to declare an immediate ceasefire in 1947 when Pakistani raiders raided Kashmir, without even consulting the then Chief of the Army Staff Gen K.N. Cariappa, that too when Indian troops were advancing towards that part of Kashmir which was already occupied by the raiders.

Dr Kashi Nath Pandita, who was the former director of Central Asian Studies at Kashmir University, while sharing the concern of Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi over the 1947 Pakistani raid, says, “In the first and the last meeting with Stalin in 1949, the Indian Ambassador Dr Radha Krishnan was taken aback when Stalin bluntly told him that as long as India had the running dog of British Imperialism as her Prime Minister, nothing would change”. Stalin had at the back of his mind the sudden declaration of ceasefire by Nehru when the Indian Army was poised for a full-blooded attack on Muzaffarabad (presently in Pak-occupied Kashmir) in 1948 when Indian forces captured Uri and were preparing the recapture of Krishan Ganga Valley. Stalin also told Dr Radha Krishnan that a message from Clement Attlee, the British Labour Prime Minister, had reached Nehru, saying, “Thus far and no further.”



## Maharaja Hari Singh

In his state, Amarnath had great reverence and admiration for Maharaja Hari Singh, who was born on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1895 in Amar Mahal, Jammu as the son of Raja Amar Singh, who was the younger brother of Maharaja Pratap Singh. Hari Singh started his reign on 25<sup>th</sup> February 1925 with the following declaration, "Although I am born Hindu, as a ruler, I possess no religion, justice will be my religion. In the happiness of my subjects lies my happiness, and in the welfare of my subjects lies my welfare."

Maharaja's rule was described as remarkably glorious by British and Indian historians, including KM Panikkar. He will be remembered for the reforms he undertook. He constituted the Praja Sabha of elected and nominated members in 1934 and appointed four of the



elected members as ministers, thereby putting the state on the path of democracy. He made primary education compulsory and opened new schools and colleges. He banned infanticide, child marriage, Sati and money lending. He enacted the State Subjects Act in 1927. He did this perhaps to save the land from grabbing by the people of Punjab at that time.

Amarnath admired Maharaja Hari Singh for his reformatory acts and his patriotism. Maharaja never allowed the flying of the Union Jack over Government buildings, as was the practice before. Later, at the request of the Viceroy, he permitted it only on the building of the British Resident. He did not strike any surreptitious deal with the British. On the contrary, at the First Round Table conference in November 1930 held in Britain, Maharaja sounded the trumpet of patriotism by demanding complete Swaraj for India. However, the Maharaja was not on good terms with Pandit Nehru due to Pandit Nehru's close association with Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah. Even



though Mohammad Ali Jinnah was Anti-Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, Maharaja Hari Singh could not digest Jinnah's aggressive, communal and divisive agenda. He spurned all the offers made by Jinnah, thereby annoying him. Though Hari Singh signed the Instrument of Accession with India, his fall as a Maharaja was a sad state of affairs. Amarnath often mentioned with agony the disastrous end of the Dogra rule but did not hold the Maharaja responsible for it. He believed that circumstances were such that Maharaja had to retreat in disguise. From 1931, Maharaja Hari Singh faced political upheavals led by Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah. An unseen Hand of the British Government was behind the Muslim uprising in 1931, causing communal riots. Amarnath opined that the Maharaja paid the price for his patriotic utterances at the First Round Table Conference in November 1930. Shri Pyarelal Koul, in his book 'Crisis in Kashmir' while commenting on the events of 1931 in J&K state, says, "The communal disturbances ensued in 1931 and thereafter invariably caused the harassment of the Hindus who had to pay a heavy toll." He further states, "Police shot dead some among the furious, instigating and insurgent Muslim mob in July 1931. Muslims retaliated against this by resorting to looting and arson, which killed some and injured others." Dr Upinder Zutshi, in his book, "Emergence of Political Awakening in J&K State," writes that what happened in 1931 onwards in the shape of communal flare-up had its roots in the emerging Muslim communalism from 1907 onwards when Muslim uprising came to the fore. However, Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, while emerging as the tallest leader and the political thinker in J&K state, always considered this unfortunate event of 1931, born out of the communal frenzy, as an unforgettable political development which could be held responsible for the socio-political upheavals that followed in the state. Taking a dig into the history of Kashmir, Pandit Vaishnavi lauded Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah's role in converting the Muslim Conference into the National Conference, which was represented even by the Hindus in 1939. Pandit Amarnath also admired his role just after the aggression in 1947 for instilling confidence among the minorities of Kashmir when many of them had been killed, looted and rendered refugees in their places of dwelling. Sheikh



Abdullah's absence in the valley, as he stayed in Bombay at the time of the aggression, had equally irked him. However, Pandit Amarnath knew well that the coming of the National Conference as a political force was a revolutionary step in the right direction and a tactful revolt against Mulla-ism. Amarnath was, however, convinced that Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah had remained its captive and that his politics rallied around the mosque and Islam. Despite being young in 1947, Amarnath Vaishnavi came into the limelight during Pakistani aggression for his activism in rehabilitating the Hindu and Sikh refugees coming from Baramulla, Sopore, Kupwara and its adjoining villages into Srinagar city. Sudhar Samiti, one of the leading Hindu Refugee Socio-cultural organizations in Srinagar city, was also active in rehabilitating the victims of the Kabali raid of Pakistan. Shri Gopi Krishan Koul, the President of the Samiti, Shri Nathji Dangroo and Shri Radha Krishan Koul were among other office bearers of the Samiti who, for days and nights, remained at the beck and call of the refugees. They would distribute among them all the aid received from the Indian army. The Sudhar Samiti had opened centres of tailoring and weaving for the orphans, widows and downtrodden members of the society so that they could earn their livelihood. The organization was also active on the cultural front, providing a stage for the community's youngsters to perform cultural programs. Pandit Vaishnavi had been associated with these youngsters as an artist who would decorate the stage on which they performed.

### His First Job as An Art Teacher

In 1947, after completing his diploma, he got a job as a teacher at Hamdania High School. He taught physical education in addition to art due to his sportsmanship and his association with the RSS. He became a popular teacher there. In 1948, RSS was banned due to Mahatma Gandhi's assassination, but he worked underground. Police tried to arrest him, but he was successful in escaping. They replaced all Shakhshas with schools in the name of Hindi Pracharini Sabha during the period of the ban. Hindi Pracharini Sabha had come into existence in Srinagar in 1936. Bhagwat Gita classes were conducted



in these schools. They used to teach Bhagwat Gita themselves. Other than the physical exercises, all other activities were being run. Their head office was in Durgeshwari Shakha Bana Mohalla. Workers from the Democratic National Conference and National Conference used to come for inspection and return after seeing them teaching Gita.

Tika Lal Tapiloo, O.N Kak, O.N Koul, Makhan Lal Aima, Janki Nath Dhobi, Som Nath Ogra, Swaroop Narayan Peshin, M.L. Khushu, M.N. Koul, Balkrishan Kachroo, Shashi Shekhar Toshkhani, Professor Chaman Lal Saproo, Professor Pran Nath Trisal, Tulsi Narayan Shishoo, Saligram Raina, Moti Lal Kemu and many others worked under the banner of Hindi Pracharini Sabha. Among other activities, they taught and learned the Hindi language. This band of workers also got engaged with the Sudhar Samiti organization and other like-minded organizations headed by Shri Gopi Krishan and Shri Janki Nath Jigyasu, who worked for widow re-marriages and for rehabilitating widows and orphans. They staged dramas to create awareness against social evils. Shri Jigyasu was a staunch Arya Samaj activist and a known social reformer.

In the same period, Shri Jawaharlal Nehru came to Kashmir for a visit. All parties wanted to welcome him. However, Sheikh Abdullah did not want any other party to meet him, therefore, he issued a ban on welcoming him. The procession was to travel in boats through River Jhelum. Hindi Pracharini Sabha installed its welcome gates on Safakadal (7th bridge), but the National Conference destroyed it. All the workers of Hindi Pracharini Sabha reached Durgeshwari Shakha and had a meeting in which they decided to organize a unified welcome on behalf of all shakhas and that a single gate would be formed in Bana Mohalla. Durgeshwari Shakha was responsible for making the arrangements, and Amarnath was the "Mukhya Shikshak" of that Shakha. They arranged boats, ropes and red cloth. They made a gate with red cloth and tied it with ropes across two ends of the river, and two of their boats also stood in the river. Men from the National Conference came and tried to destroy it. The workers from the other side were ready for the attack, and they saved the



gate. Shri Kanhaiya Lal Vuthu pushed one attacker into the river. The attackers wanted to cut the ropes that held the gate made with cloth. In the meanwhile, Superintendent of Police (SP) Shri Maheshwar Nath arrived and helped in stopping the fight. Even though the police supported the mobsters, the SP tried calming them down because Pt. Nehru was about to pass through that place. They also showered flowers on Pt. Nehru, and thus ended the tug-of-war.

All these activities were directly under the surveillance of the government, which was run by Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah. The Government of the day made it impossible for Amarnath and his associates to continue with such social activities. The reading and writing of the Hindi language were considered objectionable by the Government, thus resulting in harassment of the Hindu youth in Kashmir valley. Many of them had left the valley for good.

In 1949, he applied for the post of Art Teacher at Arya School, Pathankot, and was selected. He moved to Pathankot. He was also in charge of the School Hostel. The hostel was about one and a half kilometres from the town. It was a beautiful place, and about forty to fifty students stayed there. There was a small temple and mango trees on the premises. He became the Mukhya Shikshak in the evening Shakhas of RSS. His school administration was anti-RSS; however, they did not remove him due to his popularity with students and his skills and ability. The ban from RSS had been lifted all over India except in Jammu & Kashmir due to its special status on account of Article 370.

Amarnath's arrival in Pathankot created a new chapter in the history of his life. He gained popularity among the people of Punjab, with whom he worked shoulder to shoulder in keeping the society united and intact to meet the challenges posed by the forces inimical to such unity. His endeavour to increase the number of RSS Shakhas in and around Pathankot made him available to the high-ranking leaders of RSS and Bhartiya Jan Sangh in Punjab. Right from his childhood, Amarnath possessed the skill to connect with the masses and address their sufferings.



In Dec 1951, one Pracharak, namely Devraj from Jammu, approached him and said that they wanted to hold a camp in Pathankot as they were unable to operate freely in Jammu. He said that he needed space for the swayamsevak to stay. Devraj suggested holding the camp during the ten-day winter break in the hostel when the students would go to their homes and the hostel would be empty. The camp could be secretly organized here, and no one would come to know about it since the place was away from the city, somewhere in the middle of the forests and fields. Finally, a camp of Jammu Pracharaks was set up in his hostel. Nearly 60 to 70 people attended the camp. It went well, there was ample space and other amenities. The programme ended on a happy note.

Amarnath Vaishnavi attended his first RSS camp in 1951 in Jalandhar at DAV College. Shri Golwalkar, who was Sar Sanghchalak, Shri Dharamvir Ji and Shri Madhav Rao Mule also attended. One day it was his turn to guard the gate. Guruji came along with Shri Dharamvir Ji and Shri Madhav Rao Ji. As a practice, they had to check every visitor's entry permit, so Pandit Amarnath asked for the same from Guruji. Shri Madhav Rao Ji was about to intervene to say it was Guruji himself, but Guruji stopped him and showed his permit. Guruji was impressed by his attitude and said that he had done the right thing.

After the ban on RSS was lifted, the first camp of Sangh for Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab and Delhi regions was held together in 1952 in Delhi (Basant Sammelan). He also attended it. Again, there was a large-scale program in Punjab at Dhariwal on a big ground. It was a three-day camp, and it was impossible for him to get a leave for Sangh's work as the principal of his school was against the RSS. He pretended to have a fever on the day when he had to leave. He did not shave for two days before that. The principal came to see him, and he saw him lying on the bed and a bottle of medicine on the table. He was worried about Amarnath. He was elderly and respected and loved Amarnath because of his good habits. He told him he could keep a peon with him, and Amarnath said he would stay with a friend. The principal agreed and sent Master Lekhraj, who was also a pracharak. Master Lekhraj knew his plan and got him a rickshaw. He got ready, headed towards the railway station



straightaway, and left for Dhariwal. He had a good time for two days, and on the third day morning, he attended school.



## Chapter—4

### Praja Parishad Movement 1949-1953

The Praja Parishad movement was launched by the Dogras in Jammu in 1949 and was virtually controlled by the RSS in 1953 after the death of Dr Shyama Prasad Mukherji in Srinagar. At that time, Pandit Prem Nath Dogra was the State Sangh Chalak, and Kidar Nath Sahni and Shri Jagdish Abrol were the Pracharaks. Shri Makhan Lal Aima, Shri Omkar Nath Kak and Shri Janki Nath Koul, who had left Srinagar for Jammu in 1948 after the ban on the RSS, were now in Jammu. The ban on the Sangh in 1948 was, in fact, a significant blow to the Sangh. The Swayam Sevaks of those days had to bear the brunt with patience and fortitude. Shri Omkar Nath Kak, Shri Makhan Lal Aima and Shri Janki Nath Koul Dhobi were active participants in the movement and were jailed with other Jammu-centric RSS leaders. During those days, Pandit Vaishnavi was actively involved with RSS in Punjab. Balram Ji Tandon and Dr Baldev Prakash, an ex-minister, were the RSS pracharaks in Punjab then.

Dr Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, who was the President of All India Bhartiya Jan Sangh, announced that groups of people would be sent to Jammu in support of the movement. Posters were to be printed to make this announcement, and no press was ready to print them. Amarnath was told to arrange the posters, and Shri Sahabji, a worker, came to him to say that the posters would be pasted in the city the next day. The posters would read, "Utishth Jagrata" (wake up and get going), "Bharat Ma Ka Sir, Kashmir Bachane Ke Liye, Jammu Chalo, Permit Tod Kar" (March into Jammu, breaking the permit, to save Kashmir,



the forehead of Mother India). Sahabji was worried about how the posters would be printed. Amarnath assumed the responsibility of making the posters and told him that he would keep the poster ready the day after at 4 AM and that he should come and collect them through the window of his room, which was at the back, so that no one would come to know about it. Two hundred posters were to be prepared. The same day he bought a chart and cut the stencil of the poster. He also bought varnish and applied it to the chart. He left it for drying and went to school. While on his way back, he bought distemper and glue. He had the drawing board and stencil brush. He returned early from school and told his landlord he would be away for a camp in Dhariwal. He picked up a small bag with some clothes, locked his room and left, leaving the back window open. While everyone thought he was away, he secretly entered the room through the open window. He shut the window and spread the curtains so the light would not seep. From 5 PM to 4 AM, he prepared 200 posters. At sharp 4 AM, Sahabji knocked at the window; he had two more persons with him. They came inside quietly, and Amarnath distributed the posters between them. They left, and he followed them and went to RSS Karyalay (office) with his bag. He freshened up there and came back at 7 AM. He opened the door of his room, left his bag, made some tea and parathas, had breakfast and went to school. In the morning, the posters had gone all over the city. He read the posters along with all the other people as if he knew nothing about them. Later, the CID took off some of the posters from the walls.

Shri Bishan Das initiated the first Andholan. Pathankot swayamsewaks took up the responsibility for managing "Jail Bharo". As per the plan, people would come from other regions to Pathankot and assemble to go to "Narot Jaimal Singh". From there, they would cross the Ravi River, enter Jammu through Kathua, and start the Satyagraha. Thus, the plan was to reject the permit system in J&K. The Central government had made all the arrangements to curb the movement in Pathankot. Many CID officers and forces were deployed there, and the Armed police were moving around on horses. CID personnel in plain clothes were present at the railway station and bus stand. Their agenda was to



send all those people who would come for Satyagraha back to their respective locations. However, the agenda of Jana Sangh was to safely sneak these people into Jammu and make the movement a success. Pandit Amarnath was given two responsibilities. Firstly, he had to seek help from students to take all the incoming visitors to a location in Jammu where the girls, as sisters, would apply tilak on their foreheads before sending them off for Satyagraha. Secondly, he had to get daily pamphlets distributed through the kids. He himself escorted some people to Narot Jaimal Singh several times. It was about 16 miles away. All those satyagrahis came as 'Bhajan Mandalies' (groups who sang bhajans) under the guise of being pilgrims. One day Amarnath stood at the railway station wearing Khaki pants. He asked some satyagrahis who arrived from UP in a stern voice as to who they were and why they had come, pretending to be a CID officer. He wanted to test their courage. They boldly replied that they had come to perform bhajans and were farmers from UP. Later, he introduced himself to them. That day it was his duty, along with a few others, to escort them to Narot Jaimal Singh. He instructed them to follow a kid who playfully took them to a place where they could board a bus with another escort, where the bus would take them 4 km away from Pathankot. He and another escort were already waiting there. The police got suspicious of him and started following him. He noticed this, bought a basket of mangoes, sat down near a stream of water and started sucking the mangoes. A police officer came over and asked him, "Amarnath, what are you doing here"? He replied that he was tired after a long day in school. Moreover, it was hot, so he took a bath in the stream and was now eating some mangoes. As the officer was suspicious of him, he stood there. Amarnath offered the mangoes to the police officer and asked him to join him. At the same time, Amarnath hinted to his other accomplices with the help of gestures that they should go away and get the task accomplished. As the police did not know his accomplices, they sneaked out quietly and stopped the bus even before it reached the bus stop. There were about 22 people on board. Another escort took them from a different route. A policeman stopped the bus when it reached the bus stop but found none of the Satyagrahis. Then the policeman went away and told the sub-inspector that



there was no Satyagrahi on the bus. The sub-inspector was standing there watching Amarnath as he sat there relaxing. He kept both policemen busy with mangoes for about half an hour and chatted with them. Then a bus came from which five to six policemen got down and brought five bicycles. Then he heard the police saying that a group of 22 to 25 persons had already sneaked into Pathankot, and they decided to follow them on bicycles. This act also took them about ten minutes; by then, his folks had taken a tonga to head towards their destination. Therefore, the Satyagrahis got enough time to reach their destination. The police did not have any suspicion about Amarnath, and he departed for home with the police officers.

His landlady treated him like her son and respected him greatly because of his good behaviour. During Sankranti fast, she used to wait for him till he returned from school, then she would perform puja in his presence and eat her food only after the pooja. He had kept a separate set of clothes and khadau<sup>3</sup> for the pooja as a token of respect. He was in his twenties and had been a motherless child; therefore, he did not know any mantra except the Gayatri mantra. He used to chant this mantra during the pooja with Mataji.

One day on Sankranti, he had to drop the Swayamsevaks once again. That day he could not return on time, and Mataji kept waiting for him and did not eat anything. Her sons insisted that she eat, but she was adamant about waiting for him. She forced her sons to book a Tonga<sup>4</sup> to go and fetch him. When he came, she offered him food like a mother. This reminded him of his friend Gaje Singh's mother, who used to worship him like a God during Partheshwar Pooja, bathed him, made him wear new clothes, washed his hands and then wiped them with a towel and then, with her own hands, she would feed him hot puris, porridge and sweets. He used to feel on top of the world. On other days she was like a typical mother who displayed a mix of love and anger.

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<sup>3</sup> Wooden Sandals

<sup>4</sup> Horse cart



It was February 1953 when he escorted the swayamsewaks to cross the river Ravi, and he could get to sleep for just two hours, in the bushes on the ground and on the soil and stones. In the morning, he had to be present in the school. Therefore, he did not get proper sleep. Sometimes he used to sleep while standing in the class. Most of his students used to visit various shakhas and understood what he was going through. Therefore, they used to keep the classroom door closed and do their work quietly. They treated him like their elder brother; some even called him Bhaji.

One day, an 8<sup>th</sup> standard student who was a swayamsewak was distributing newsletters related to RSS and his uncle, who was in CID, saw him. The boy thought that his uncle would not object. On the other hand, his uncle thought that his nephew would give him all the information which could help him get a promotion. When both were face to face, the boy gave one newsletter to his uncle, and the uncle asked him to handover all to him. On hearing this, the boy understood his uncle's intentions and threw the newsletters in the air, and immediately people came to grab the posters. Uncle asked, "Why did you not give them to me?" The boy was clever and, in turn, said, "What did I have to give you? I had nothing in my hands". The CID officer took him home and complained to his mother, who was his sister. He said that if the boy told him all about where these were printed and who was managing the entire publicity, he would get a promotion, and then he would buy clothes and a bicycle for his nephew. He requested his sister to persuade her son to share the information with him. She was, however, a lady of very strong values. She pretended to scold her son to please her brother but hinted at him through gestures not to reveal any information. With the same pretence, his mother slapped him a couple of times and insisted that he tell the name of the person who had given the newsletters for distribution. The boy did not reveal his name. His uncle took him to the police station, beat him and even hanged him upside down, but he still did not reveal his name. In the end, an idea struck the boy's mind, and he said he would state the truth. He was made to sit, and then he said, "An unknown man wearing a hat and riding a bicycle handed them to him along

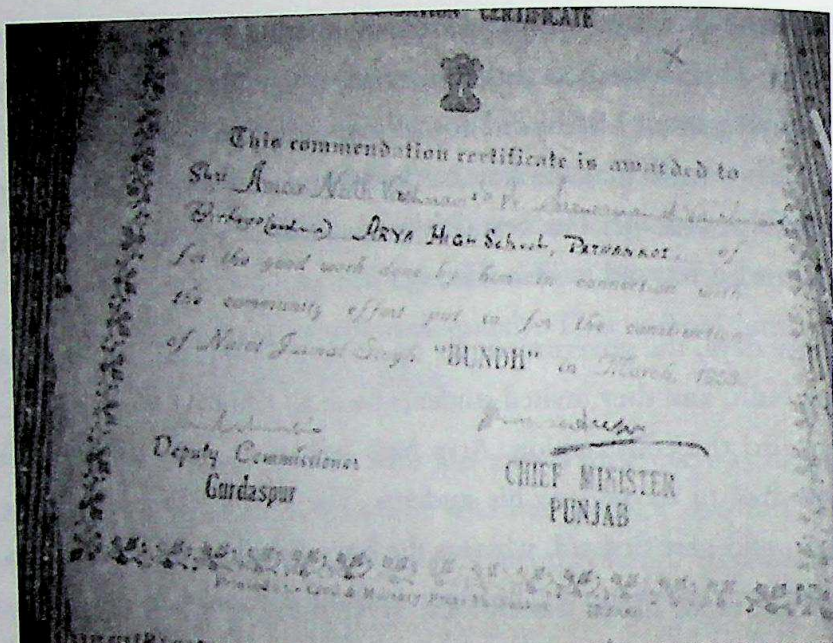


with fifty paise. He was happy to get the money and did not mind distributing the newsletters. He was scared that his mother would scold him if he told her about receiving money, so he did not tell the truth. Uncle released him, and he came back home. When the boy reached home, his mother kissed him and appreciated his courage. The next day he narrated the whole incident to Pandit Amarnath, who was sad to hear this.

After a few days, the government set up camp at Narot Jaimal Singh. A dam was to be built, and they invited students from all schools for one week each to contribute to the construction. Arya high school was also called upon, and Amarnath had to accompany his students. The girls used to cook, serve food and water, and give first aid, whereas the boys did physical labour. Amarnath was in charge of the group and he supervised and even worked with them. After one week, when he returned, he had to reach the school as a photograph was to be clicked with an outgoing batch of 10<sup>th</sup> standard students. It was 11.30 AM, and he was heading towards the school after freshening up.

A student with him insisted that Amarnath get his shoes polished as a photograph would be clicked, and a tea party was organized. While getting his shoes polished, he saw Shri Amarnath Tarosdar (Saproo), on duty for J&K police in Pathankot, driving a jeep very fast. As soon as Mr. Tarosdar saw him, he applied a sudden break with a screeching sound and got down from the jeep. Then he ran towards Inspector Sharma and asked him to arrest Pandit Amarnath. They did not have an arrest warrant, and the inspector had been watching him for fifteen minutes without arresting him; Tarosdar compelled the inspector to arrest him. After a while, Amarnath was surrounded by police, and the inspector walked towards him and asked him his name. Amarnath said, "Amarnath Vaishnavi." Then he asked his father's name, and Amarnath replied, "Shri Sarvanand Vaishnavi." Then in a very stern tone, he asked him to come to the police station. Hearing this, he got angry and said, "How dare you ask me to go to the police station? Am I a thief or a smuggler? I am a teacher. You illiterate! Don't you know how to speak to a teacher? I am not coming with you. You must apologize to me in front of the public."





Certificate of appreciation by Punjab government

Haven't you ever interacted with literate and cultured people?" Amarnath sat down and said, "Do whatever you want to do." In the meanwhile, a lot of people got together, and he shouted, "Sheikh Ki Sheikhi" ... and the public shouted back, "Nahi Chalegi, Nahi Chalegi". Then people started shouting, "Dr Mukherjee Amar Rahen, Amarnath Amar Rahe". The Inspector was taken aback to see so much crowd. He immediately kept his revolver inside, fearing he might accidentally press it. Then he started apologizing to Amarnath and said, "Amarnath, I made a mistake by raising my voice at you, please come with me to the police station." Pandit Amarnath walked up to the jeep where Amarnath Tarosdar sat, shouting slogans, "Dr Mukherjee's demand, Ek Pradhan, Ek Vidhan, Ek Nishan." He stood inside the jeep and told the inspector, "Inspector sahib, my shoes are with the cobbler who was polishing them. Should I walk to the police station barefooted?" On hearing this, the Inspector himself went and got his shoes in his hands. Tarosdar insisted he sit down quietly without shouting slogans. He said to him in a high pitch, "I am not a thief or a smuggler, I am a political leader, and your job is to drive the jeep." Then he again started shouting slogans, and thousands of people



followed the vehicle till they reached the police station. His students came over with sweets, and his school Principal got milk and bananas. Still, no arrest warrant had been issued, and he kept waiting.

Shri Amarnath Tarosdar went to meet Shri D P Kachroo, the J&K Trade Commissioner. He reported to him about the arrest of Pandit Amarnath to receive appreciation from him. Shri Kachroo immediately reached the sub-jail where Pandit Amarnath had been kept. His school Principal was sitting with him at that time. Shri Kachroo believed that Amarnath would beg him to release him and fall on his feet. He, therefore, intentionally passed by him and ignored him. Then he sent SHO Sharma to him. Sharma Ji said, "Amarnath, he knows you well, and he knows that you are a decent man; you do not have anything to do with this movement. If you give it in writing that you have no association with this movement, he will release you." Amarnath replied, "Sharma Ji, it means that you know me, and I am here because of your mistake; you must correct your mistake. I don't need to give anything in writing. Let me sit here; I am not a thief, so I have no fear, nor am I weak." Then Sharma Ji said, "Who knows, tomorrow you might become a minister, then you will have a high reputation." Pandit Amarnath, in turn, nodded in the affirmative and suggested to him jokingly that he should also join the movement and quit saluting his officers all the time. Amarnath said, "You will become a home minister, and your IG will salute you. It will be fun." Sharma ji smiled and walked away.

It was 11.30 PM, and the warrant had still not come. He was sitting with his Principal and the SHO in the SHO's office. They ate bananas and drank milk; they also ate sweets. Finally, the warrant was received at 11.45 PM. The warrants had been prepared at Mr Tarosdar's residence, and he had levelled serious charges against him. Pandit Amarnath smiled when he saw this. A room was given to him. He demanded that the room be clean because he was an orthodox Kashmiri Pandit and was used to hygienic life. On hearing this, they cleaned the room with Phenyl twice and got fresh blankets. They also lighted



Dhoop for a good smell. The Principal escorted him to the room, hugged him and left. It was the month of March, and the year was 1953.

Two tenth-standard boys arrived from Punjab for Satyagraha at 8 AM the next day. Both Lav and Kush walked around in the market singing songs on Bharat Mata and Kashmir. The armed forces cordoned off the entire Pathankot. Even the armed forces were spellbound by their melodious singing. They kept narrating the history of Kashmir in all the markets. When they finally reached the main Post Office Chowk in Pathankot, the armed forces were surprised to see them taking out garlands from their pockets which they themselves wore. Subsequently, they started shouting slogans, "Bharat Mata Ki Jai", "Kashmir Bachao, Desh Bachao". The police were alerted, and finally, the boys were arrested at 11.30 AM. They were brought into his cell in the jail. Amarnath gave them fruits to eat. They were very happy. Chapatis and milk were brought for the boys, and his students had got sweets for him. They all ate ample food. He asked them about their motivation to join the Satyagraha. One of them said, "I was preparing for my 10<sup>th</sup> standard examination; my mother came and asked me to stop studying and save our country's honour by saving Kashmir. She said that Dr Mukherji has called upon us and that they should not miss this opportunity to save our country's head. There will be enough opportunities to sit in the examinations, but there is only one opportunity to save the country." The students had given up their studies and set out to save the nation. They were caught by the police several times. Once, the police left them at some unknown place, but they walked back. Then the police threw them into a stream. When they escaped from that, too, the police caught them again and left them in Jalandhar. They came back from Jalandhar too and finally reached Pathankot for the Satyagraha and were kept with him in the same jail.

The boys spent the night with him in the same cell. The next day, four policemen came and asked them all to get ready as they wanted to take them to Gurdaspur jail. The police found it difficult to handcuff one of the boys as his arms were thin, and the handcuff was slipping out. He said to the policeman



that they had not come to escape. They were not the ones who would even try doing it. He suggested to them to tie a chain. They did the same and left in a jeep. On the way, they kept shouting slogans, and people kept responding. There was a railway track in between, and they stopped as the train had to pass. They learned that Begum Abdullah, the wife of Sheikh Abdullah, was travelling by that train to visit Amritsar, and they shouted slogans, "Sheikh ki Sheikhi Nahin Chalegi, Nahi Chalegi", "Bakshi ka Danda Nahin Chalega", "Hum Kya Chahte, Ek Pradhan, Ek Vidhan, Ek Nishan". The train passed by, and the people inside heard their slogans.

They reached Gurdaspur jail at 11.30 am. The jailor's name was Kaliya. Durga Prasad Kachroo had informed the jailor in advance that Amarnath Vaishnavi was the one who wore a red turban and blue shorts and that he was a very staunch RSS man who should be taught a lesson. The Jailor sent the two boys to join other Satyagrahis. He gave Amarnath a stern look and ordered his staff to put him in a cell. The cell was a small room with a small ventilator and a door. He was not allowed to go out except to use the toilet. He stayed in the room all day and night for a week. After a week, he was shifted to a room with "B class" facilities. The room had a bed, table, two chairs, and an attached bathroom. One more person who shared the room with him was Shri Tilak Raj Gandhi. He, too, was a vegetarian like Amarnath. Amarnath got a chance to pick up a quarrel with Kaliya when Amarnath suggested to Tilak Raj Ji that he ask the authorities to serve him meat. Jail authorities had asked all prisoners to express their food preferences in advance so that they could order their contractors accordingly. The moment meat was delivered to the room, Amarnath was enraged and started throwing the furniture out of the room. Kaliya had to come himself. Kaliya said, "Do you know me? I am Kaliya, and I have handled Congress Satyagrahis; I was trained in England." Amarnath, in turn, replied that he was Vaishnavi and had come from Kashmir and was not a criminal. Amarnath asked him to mind his language. He said he could not tolerate meat in the same kitchen where his food was cooked. He, therefore, insisted that they make a separate arrangement for his food. Ultimately, after



many altercations, Kaliya had to give in. Later, he sent utensils to Amarnath. The jailor also sent sugar, milk etc., out of a daily allowance of Rs 5 allocated for B Category convicts. Two more satyagrahis joined him, Shri Vaid Ji and Khajuria Ji. When they asked for more facilities according to Punjab jail rules, Kalia requested their transfer to another jail. After one month, the four of them, including Vaishnavi ji, were transferred to Ambala jail.

As they travelled to Ambala, they got a warm response from people all along the way. People greeted them with slogans, and food was arranged at every station. They also showered flowers on them. Ambala station was full of a large crowd who welcomed them with slogans and flowers and offered them fruits and sweets. Then they reached the jail in police jeeps.

Many other prominent leaders had been kept in Ambala jail. Among them were Jan Sangh leaders Shri Mol Chandra Sharma, advocate Khajuria, Shri U M Trivedi, who was an MP, Shri Balraj Madhok, Prof. Mohani, Shri Hardayal Gupta, Shri Lajpat Rai, Dr NC Chatterji and Shri Deshpande. Ambala jail had a happy atmosphere. They used to have discussions during the day and run Shakhas in the evening. He had only one shirt and a pair of blue shorts, and a pair of shoes. He was wearing those clothes when he was arrested while getting his shoes polished on the way to school after returning from the camp set up at Narot Jaimal Singh for building a dam on river Ravi. He was carrying nothing else with him. After many days, IG prison came to their barracks along with the jail superintendent. Jailor Shri Mattoo was a Kashmiri Pandit. Amarnath and the others were together. He was wearing only underwear because he had washed his only shirt and shorts. He stood behind everyone else to hide his bare-naked body. Mr. Mattoo, however, saw him and said to the IG, "That man at the back, I thought he was a Kashmiri, but I was wrong." Amarnath immediately replied, "You are right. I am hundred per cent Kashmiri." But why are you standing so far at the back?" he asked. Amarnath replied, "I am educated and a teacher, and I did not think it was appropriate to stand in front without clothes." Then Mr Mattoo asked him what had stopped him from wearing clothes. Amarnath explained to him as to how and



when he was arrested and that he did not get the opportunity to pick up his belongings. Mr. Mattoo was displeased with this, and he asked the Dy. Superintendent as to why he was not given clothes, and he subsequently advised that Amarnath should be given clothes from the store as an interim arrangement. Mr. Mattoo ordered cloth for stitching kurta pyjamas. He also ordered shoes and warm coats for all as the winter had set in. He was taken to the store and got two pairs of Khadi kurtas and pyjamas, one turban, two underwear and a towel. After a month, eight of them, including Pandit Amarnath, were sent to Shimla to be presented before an advisory board. They were accompanied by eight soldiers and a DSP, and they were not handcuffed. They requested the DSP to take them around Shimla, and he responded positively. They travelled by train, and on the way, they continued to shout slogans.

On reaching Shimla, they saw a large police force there to take them to the sub-jail. They already had eight policemen and a DSP along with them, and now with this large force, it became a large procession. The DSP was also unhappy to see such a large gathering of the police force; he felt that ten policemen would have been sufficient since they were all unarmed. They finally reached the sub-jail. They were allotted a servant who would cook for them till they stayed there. They found out that this servant knew nothing about cooking. They protested against this and persuaded the authorities to arrange for food from a hotel. They also decided that they would not cooperate with the advisory board the next day until their demands were accepted. The demands were that they should arrange a proper cook for them, make curd available and increase their daily allowance from Rs 5 to Rs 10 as the cost of living in Shimla was higher.

The next day Pandit Amarnath was the first to be called by the advisory board. He refused to answer any of their questions and presented his demands. Later, they called the other seven of his accomplices, and they also put forth the same demands. The judge took out a poster and asked the other person whether he had made that. The poster was made by Pandit Amarnath. He had made two



hundred copies with the help of a Stencil. Everyone, however, refused to say anything, and they walked out insisting on the fulfilment of their demands. The judges prepared a report on their own without listening to them and sent them back in three days to Ambala.

The judges had advised that Pandit Amarnath and one Mr. Khajuria be imprisoned for six months, and the rest were to be released. They were sent back to Ambala jail. After two weeks, Advocate Vyas filed a Habeas Corpus application, and these two also came under the purview of Habeas Corpus. After a discussion for 120 days, the application was accepted. They were taken to Delhi. The day he had to leave for Delhi, his brother Bhaji came to see him. The jail contractor told him about his arrival, that his blanket and money were stolen on the way, and that he had no money. Amarnath had only Rs 20 deposited in the jail, which would not have been sufficient for Bhaji to pay for his return journey to Haripur Kangra, where he was posted as a teacher. He asked the contractor to give Rs 20 to his brother and also gave his brother a letter for the principal of Arya School, Pathankot, so that he could give him his one month's salary. His two month's salary was unpaid. He was made to sit in the police bus, and Bhaji came to see him near the window of the bus. Bhaji had tears in his eyes, as he loved him very much. Amarnath consoled him and said that the Supreme Court would release him and he would return in two weeks. He suggested that he stay at Pathankot and wait for him. The police bus left for Delhi, and they reached Delhi jail. It was 1953, and Tihar jail was not built till then.

It was January 1954, and they were taken to court after one week. A bench of three judges was present. Two of the judges were Justice Das and Justice Mahajan. There were three charges against him. Firstly, he held a secret meeting at Khara Khuh Chowk in which he addressed the public and made people take an oath that they would all participate in the Jammu agitation by swearing with their hands over the fire. Secondly, he had collected weapons from all over the country and sent them to Jammu. Lastly, he had collected money from outside Jammu and sent it to Jammu.



Justice Mahajan questioned the public prosecutor about where the Khara Khuh Chowk was located. The prosecutor knew nothing about it. Then he asked him again, and he replied that there was a crossing of very narrow lanes in Pathankot where a well was situated. The water of this well tasted bitter, and therefore it was given this name. The judge questioned the advocate, "You are saying that he conducted a secret meeting and addressed the public where he made them take an oath. Please clarify whether this meeting was secret or it was public. How can it be both?" The prosecutor could not explain, and therefore the judge rejected the charge. Regarding the second charge, the judge questioned whether there was an episode of return firing from the mob in Jammu, and the prosecutor replied that there was none. The judge, therefore, rejected the charge saying that if the weapons were used by the mob, retaliation from the other side was imminent. In the end, the judge said that if the first and second charges were wrong, the third charge was also unreasonable. The judges then announced their verdict, according to which these leaders were freed with due honour, and all the charges against them were unreasonable. The decision was announced at 10.45 AM, and they were set free at 11 AM.

Then, the police inspector refused to pick up the eight of them in the police vehicle. However, they did not let the vehicle proceed. Finally, the police took them to jail on the bus, and they were also paid money to reach home. They bought train tickets for Pathankot for those who lived in Pathankot. Thousands of people waited outside the station for their welcome as the message of their release reached Pathankot. They lifted them on their shoulders, and there was a procession. Later, a function was organized to welcome them back. Amarnath met his elder brother, and he also went to the school where the principal had told him that he could not join back due to his association with the Sangh. He asked him to quit the RSS since the management committee of the school comprised of Congress supporters. Amarnath bid goodbye to him and decided to go elsewhere. While walking back to his rented home, he met Mr. Tara Shah, a member of the management committee. He had lived in Kashmir, and therefore he could speak Kashmiri



also. He asked, "Varay Chu (meaning 'are you all right')"? He said he was fine. He asked him whether he had joined his job back, and Amarnath told him about the condition placed by the principal. On hearing this, Tara Shah got angry and said that he would handle the matter. The next day Tara Shah sent his resignation. This was followed by the resignation of another member. Both of them used to give very hefty donations to the school. Upon receiving the resignations, the principal found out the reason for the same and rushed to Amarnath's house. He requested him to join back and said that he was joking and that the condition he placed was not real. He insisted that he join soon as the students were also waiting very eagerly for him. Thus, he joined his duty again.

While Pandit Amarnath was away in jail, his students discussed amongst themselves that they should free his rented room and keep his luggage with them because he might lose his job and would not be able to pay the rent. The landlord did not allow them to take his luggage, unsure whether it was the right thing to do. The students asked the landlord to give it in writing that he would not charge him any rent for the period while he was away. Then after a lot of discussions and negotiations, his students succeeded, and they distributed his luggage amongst themselves. When Amarnath came back from jail, he had no place to go, therefore, he stayed in the school library for one month. His students got him bedding and clothes. He used to bathe near the well, which was inside the school and would eat in the nearby hotel. Such was his student's love for him. After a month, he got one room in a house where two families lived on the ground floor, and he lived on the first floor. The ground floor was occupied by his favourite student, "Satpal Anand" and his friend, who lived with his newlywed wife. Satpal had some issues to be settled in the family, and Amarnath helped him in resolving the same.

Pandit Amarnath started taking classes again, and life went on smoothly. In 1954, the golden jubilee of the Arya Samaj was celebrated in Pathankot, and he was in charge of organizing the event. The event went on very smoothly, because of which he was honoured with a certificate by the Arya Samaj.



Pathankot gave him many opportunities to do good work, and he also got a lot of respect and love from the people.

### Exposing Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah

The Praja Parishad movement exposed Sheikh Abdullah completely. He started addressing people in the state against the movement and made his intentions clear about a plebiscite being the only alternative to creating peace in J&K. The Praja Parishad movement showed the door to the Sheikh Abdullah government. He was dethroned, and Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad was appointed Prime Minister with Dr. Karan Singh as the “Sadar-e-Riyasat” of the state in late 1953.

On the night of 8<sup>th</sup> August 1953, when the Sheikh and his wife were asleep in the Tourist Hut in Gulmarg, a famous tourist resort, his door was knocked at night by his secretary Shri R.C. Raina who told him that the Indian Army had surrounded the hut and that the S.P. J&K police, Laxman Das Thakur, was waiting outside the hut to arrest him. Soon Thakur entered his room with an official of “Sadar-e-Riyasat” Dr. Karan Singh, who handed him the order dismissing the Sheikh government. Soon Thakur arrested Sheikh Abdullah. Dr K.N. Pandita says, “The Praja Parishad Nationalist resistance movement in Jammu in 1953 exposed Sheikh’s masked profile under which he dispensed autocratic, parochial and communal governance. In a public speech in Jammu, Sheikh had said in the same year that Pandit Nehru said he did not know who this Prem Nath Dogra was and what he stood for. Four months later, Pandit Nehru removed his bosom friend Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah from power, put him behind bars and initiated a case of sedition against him. A decade later, just before his death, Nehru sent his bosom friend Jenab Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah to negotiate a deal with General Ayub of Pakistan, who turned down the offer of confederation brokered by the Pandit Nehru and Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah combine. They had not taken the Parliament or the State legislature into confidence for having such a deal with Pakistan.”



During the same period, the activities of RSS were disliked by politicians in the valley. The Democratic National Conference, headed by Shri Ghulam Mohammad Sadiq, the National Conference, and the banned organization of Sheikh Abdullah, the "Plebiscite Front", were highly critical of its work. In September 1953, a meeting of the RSS members was to be addressed by RSS Pracharak and a youthful leader, Shri M L Aima, at Arya Samaj Hall at Karan Nagar. The people who attended this address were beaten, and stones were pelted at them, many of whom were injured. Shri Aima received severe head injuries. The meeting could not be held, and M.L. Aima, M.L. Pandita, C.L. Saproo and Pushkarnath were arrested.

### Departure from Pathankot

In early 1954, a friend of Amarnath and a relative created a misunderstanding in his father's mind regarding his living condition in Pathankot. They had visited him in Pathankot, and they told his father that his economic condition was bad and he did not have food to eat, his clothes were torn, and his health was also deteriorating, including his unstable mental health. His father was ill, and this news made him sad. He decided to find a job for him in Kashmir. This relative had visited him in 1954 in Pathankot and had stayed with him for a week. He was five to six years older than Amarnath, who treated him as his elder brother. However, he was jealous of all the love and respect that Amarnath got from the people of Pathankot. He was the first person to lie about his state of health to his father.

In 1954 during his summer holidays, Amarnath started a 'moun vrat' (observing silence) for 21 days. This was something that he occasionally practiced. He used to stay in a small cottage on the outskirts of the city in Agyatwas (staying at a location unknown to the external world). Only two of his students, Omprakash and Somprakash, who were also brothers, knew the location, and they used to visit him twice a day. If he needed any help, Amarnath would tell them by writing it down, and they used to help. A friend of Amarnath visited him in Pathankot during that time from Shimla. His name



was Shyamlal Dhar Bahar, and he was his childhood friend. He had left his job in Shimla and was heading towards Srinagar. He had booked his air ticket for Srinagar the next day and was carrying heavy luggage. He looked for Amarnath in the city to dump this luggage at his place. Om and Som came to know about this, and they informed Amarnath. He asked them to allow him to meet him without disclosing it to anyone else. Little did he know that it was his biggest mistake in life (or maybe a test of God). Shyam Ji insisted that he should speak. Amarnath wrote that he would talk to him at 8.30 AM the next morning, and in case he spoke at that moment, all his effort for the last 20 days would go waste as his 'moun vrat' would break. On the contrary, Shyam Ji pricked him with a needle and the nib of a pen. Amarnath thought that God was testing his patience. He did not give in; some ethereal power helped him, allowing him to resist his provocation and pass the test. Shyamlal left his place in anger leaving behind his heavy luggage, and flew to Srinagar. He lied to Amarnath's father about his condition, so Amarnath ultimately had to give up his job in Pathankot and return to Srinagar. He also brought Shyam ji's heavy luggage to Srinagar and had to pay a hefty sum for the same.



## Chapter – 5

### Re-entry into Valley as a Social and Political Activist (1955 - 1989)

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#### Leaving Pathankot for Good & Induction into NCC

In the year 1954, his father wrote many letters asking him to return from Pathankot to Srinagar, but he postponed his return till 15 December. He had started liking his work, and people had started knowing him in Pathankot. He was not aware that his father had some misconceptions about his living conditions which some people had created in his mind. Sarvanand thought that his son was living in poverty, in filthy conditions. Had Amarnath known what was in his father's mind, he would have visited him and clarified his misunderstandings. Sarvanand even sent him telegrams, but he did not pay attention to them. Finally, he received a letter from his father, which he said would be his last letter on this matter. In this letter, he quoted lines from Lalleshwari's lyric, "Mari suy ta maaran tas, Yus na Guru Shabdas Yach ta Pach Kari", meaning one who does not obey his guru gets slain. He wrote that he had been his mother, father and guru, so it was his order that he return, and it was for him to decide whether to obey. When he read the letter, he felt sad and decided to leave behind a bright future that he had anticipated in Pathankot. He gave his resignation to his principal on 15<sup>th</sup> December 1955. The principal tried to persuade him not to leave. However, all he could remember at that time was his father, who was an ideal father indeed.



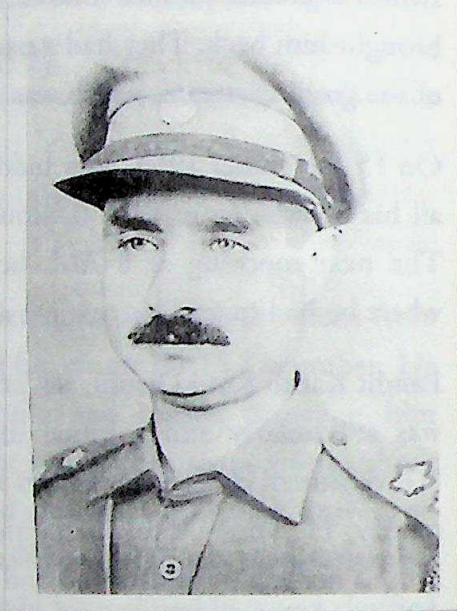
Students and teachers organized a function to bid him farewell at a place called Sarna, which was close to a stream of water and was 5 km away from Pathankot. Teachers were chatting, students were playing, a Halwai was frying puris, and he, along with some students and teachers, was swimming in the stream. One student who did not know swimming sat quietly next to the stream. He suddenly slipped and fell into it. The flow of the stream was swift. Amarnath jumped into the water, lifted him on his shoulders, and brought him back. They had a narrow escape, trying to swim against the flow of the gushing stream, which was turning into a waterfall in some distance.

On 15 December 1955, after bidding goodbye to his colleagues, students and all his friends, he reached Jammu first and from there, he came to Srinagar. The next morning at 8 AM, he went to Bandipore in District Baramulla, where he had to join his new job at Government High School.

Pandit Kanth Koul Dembi, his principal, was from Rainawari (Srinagar). He was a scholarly and spiritual man and very honest too. He would say, "Government charges a fee from students, and we must do full justice to this money. He knew Arabic and Sanskrit, and one old Maulvi used to come to him to make him understand and read the Holy Quran. He built the Science department in the school from scratch. Initially, when there was no science department, students used to go to Sopore, which was 15 km from Bandipore, to study the subject. Later he collected a donation of Rupees five thousand and put together a laboratory. He used to teach Science and later appointed a science teacher. His school used to stand first in all sports activities, and he used to get a ninety per cent pass percentage in his art classes. Students used to love him, and he was also respected in the education department. After the retirement of Shri Dembi, Shri Sadauddin was appointed as the principal of the school. He was also a man of principles. Amarnath received love and respect from him too. After one and a half years, Amarnath was transferred to Handwara Senior Secondary School. Handwara was situated in District Kupwara. Here also he used to teach Art and was additionally the sports in charge.



Many schools made attempts to have him on board. Finally, Shri Sogami, who was a minister during the reign of Shri Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, succeeded in taking Amarnath into the Senior Secondary School at Lolaab in Sogam. Here also he started the celebration of Independence Day. An annual program by the name of "Jashne Bahar" was launched. Ministers from all over India would visit Kashmir, and people in the districts of Kupwara, Srinagar and Baramulla also used to celebrate this function. Four High Schools participated in this function in Lolab. Here, Handwara Higher Secondary School also presented some items. He was made responsible for organizing this function. The function was very successful, and the Government Films Division covered the function. Handwara Higher Secondary School stood first, and Lolaab School stood second. After witnessing his performance as a very effective organizer of various functions, the authorities selected him for the NCC commission.



In NCC uniform

### Handwara Independence Day Celebration- First Time in the History of Kashmir

Pandit Vaishnavi created history for himself in his official tenure at Handwara. He was showered affection by residents there because of his selfless service to every human being irrespective of caste, colour and creed. For the first time in the history of Handwara in 1960, 15th August (Independence Day) was celebrated by hoisting the national flag followed by the guard of Honour and parade. The initiative for this was taken by Amarnath Vaishnavi as the NCC



Officer of the Higher Secondary School, Handwara. Many other schools participated in this programme, including the policemen in uniform. The then local MLA of Handwara named Shri Gulam Qadir, attended the Guard of Honour and took the salute.

Amarnath, in full NCC uniform, led the NCC cadets in the parade and a grave mistake by one of the groups in the march past while bending the flag at the saluting base was set right by Amarnath spontaneously, avoiding any misgiving among people present there. Since then, Independence Day and Republic Day celebrations became a part of the yearly celebrations of the locals residing in Handwara. However, right from that day, Amarnath was put under surveillance by the Government of India through the Intelligence Bureau for reasons unknown. He also started the custom of celebrating Janmashtami in Lolab and Sogam. People who had been scared since 1947 and had given up celebrating festivals started getting involved once again. In 1959, he got the NCC commission, and in 1960, an NCC unit was sanctioned for Handwara Higher Secondary School. Pandit Amarnath was transferred back to Handwara. His students and others who knew him gave him a warm welcome. Here also he initiated the celebrations of Janmashtami and other festivals. In Bhadrakali, Dussehra was celebrated. Though people showed reluctance to celebrate the festivals initially due to fear, he was instrumental in reinstating the confidence again in them. The custom of celebrating Independence Day, Janmashtami and Dussehra, initiated by Pandit Vaishnavi, became a regular feature in Baramulla, Kupwara and Sopore districts. In Sopore, Dussehra used to be celebrated on a grand scale. Thousands of people used to watch the same. In Handwara, the students were very loyal to him, they would do anything for him and would assist him in organizing such celebrations. Three of his students, Chaman Lal, Abdul Ahad Sofi and Nazeer Ahmad, were considered to be his adopted sons. Shri Chaman Lal Moti stayed in touch with him till Amarnath's last breath.



When he was first transferred to Sogam, he met his Guru, a spiritual man by the name "Dhuni Baba". He would on and off visit his Guru and seek his blessings. When he was transferred to Sogam a second time, he went to say pranam to Swami Ji and seek his blessings. Here at Sogam, he formed a group of students and started giving them NCC training with the hope that an NCC unit would be sanctioned for the school. This, however, did not happen, and he was disappointed. However, a few days later, when he met his Guru, the Guru asked him about the NCC uniform and why he didn't use the same. He ordered, tomorrow when you go to school, do not forget to wear it. The next day he went to the school in full uniform. The day started as usual, with student attendance, class etc. While he was sitting in the Head Master's room, he heard some people shouting. As they looked outside, they found some teachers shouting at each other. Soon two groups were formed, and they started hitting each other with sticks. He got up and blew the whistle. On hearing the whistle, the students of his NCC group gathered, and he instructed them to separate the two groups and put them in separate rooms. After a few days, an NCC unit was sanctioned for the school. Amarnath gave the credit for the sanction of the NCC cadet to his Guru, who had instructed him to go to school in NCC uniform. This is how he started giving NCC training to his students officially.

### Political Developments in the State (1955 Onwards)

In 1955 Vaishnavi came back to the valley. His entry into the valley was marked by an event which had wider implications on the political weather of the State of Jammu and Kashmir. Only a few months before Vaishnavi's entry into Kashmir, Mirza Mohammad Afzal Beig, who was the right-hand man of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, was released from jail on the ground of ill health. He was arrested earlier along with Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah in the Kashmir Conspiracy case. Immediately after his release Mirza Mohammad Afzal Beig floated a separatist outfit called Plebiscite Front to express resentment against the Indian Union for not accepting the demand of holding a referendum in Kashmir.



A prudent Muslim leader of those days known by the name of Maulana Masoodi, who was also a visionary, did not favour the formation of an outfit with a communal overtone and advised Afzal Beig to disband Pelibicite Front and to come up with some other organization with a secular face. This suggestion did not go down very well, and the separatist outfit started showing their true colours. Maulana Masoodi was later killed by the militants in the early 1990s.

The political atmosphere of the state kept on boiling for years, resulting in mob violence and bloodshed in the valley, threatening the very foundation of the cultural heritage of Jammu and Kashmir. The minorities of Jammu and Kashmir got terrified because of the communal upheaval in Kashmir and even beyond Kashmir. It reached Jammu and various districts of J&K, creating terror among the Hindu and Sikh communities.

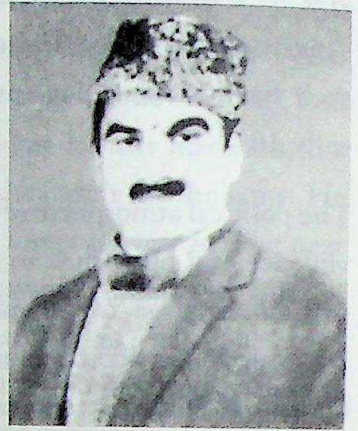
Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, a courageous leader, the Prime Minister of the State, continued to fight this anti-Indian movement with all his might. He curbed this movement sending all anti-Indian forces to jail. On the other hand, the pro-patriotic forces of the state carried out protest rallies in the state, particularly in the Jammu region.

The minorities of Kashmir who were carrying the bloodstains and the painful events of 1931 and 1947 had turned restless, for they had every apprehension that their existence was in danger. It was from here that Amarnath Vaishnavi and his erstwhile associates had an urgent meeting to strengthen the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh brotherhood and visit the families of minorities in different villages, cities and towns of the valley to restore confidence in them. This group of nationalists even stopped many Hindu and Sikh families from leaving their homes, who had been receiving threats from pro-freedom groups, to leave Kashmir.



## Emerging as a Leading Social Activist

In 1962, a social cum cultural organization named Vivekananda Society came into existence at Srinagar. This organization was founded by Pandit Amarnath Ganjoo and Pandit Vaishnavi; Shri Heera Lal Chatta, Shri Tika Lal Taploo, Shri Pushkar Nath Karneil, Shri Durga Prashad Koul, Shri Madan Lal Khushu, Pandit Prem Nath Bhat, a leading advocate from Anantnag, Pandit Harjilal Jad and many others became its active members. Soon, many old RSS workers, namely Shri Soom Nath Ogra, Shri Hriday Nath Bhat, Shri Moti Lal Zadur, Shri Moti Lal Malla, Shri Brij Nath Akhoon, Shri Moti Lal Lidu, Shri Arjan Nath Sapru, Shri Birbal Sahani, Shri Pushkar Nath Raina, Shri Gopi Nath Garyali a leading advocate of Baramulla, Shri Sham Lal, a leading advocate of Handwara, Shri Bansi Lal Kachroo, Shri Jialal Koul, Shri Chunilal, Shri TN Razdan, presently the National President of JK Vichar Manch and many others joined the fray. This organization got a fillip under the patronage of Shri Bhagwat Swaroop, an RSS pracharak from Jammu who resided in Srinagar for a decade to guide Shri Amarnath Ganjoo and others to spread the message of social togetherness throughout the valley and extend the scope of activities of RSS up to Ladakh, where Amarnath Vaishnavi had initiated the activities of social welfare as early as 1968-69 when he was transferred there from Srinagar while working as a teacher in the government school in Srinagar.



Pandit Premnath Bhat

It was the same year when China invaded India by deceit. The Chinese forces raising slogans, "Hindi Chini Bhai (Indians and Chinese are brothers)", entered the Indian territory. In that battle, the Indian forces suffered a great loss. It was winter, and the Indian forces were not very well equipped. They shivered in the cold and were at the receiving end. RSS workers of Jammu and



Kashmir worked day and night to contribute whatever was possible to make the Indian forces comfortable. Shri Amarnath Ganjoo and Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi were at the forefront of managing the RSS volunteers to accomplish the said task.

### Vivekananda Society – Guarding the Peace & Harmony

Shri Shamsuddin was the Chief Minister of the J&K State when on 28<sup>th</sup> December 1963, the news that the Moie Muqaddas (Holi relic) was stolen from Hazratbal Shrine spread like wildfire. People in the valley of Kashmir came to the streets to express their grief. The Hindus and Sikhs remained solidly behind their Muslim Brethren to express their sympathies in that hour of crisis. The tension was mounting as Moie Muqaddas was considered the greatest treasure by Kashmiri Muslims in Kashmir, which was brought to the valley in the 1700 century.

The Vivekananda Society as an organization remained vigilant and alerted to share the grief of the Muslim community and also to guard the Hindu community against any untoward incident in the valley. This is because the Hindus of Kashmir had an apprehension that if protest rallies continued for days altogether in case Moi-e-Muqadas could not be traced, it could end in communal clashes.

Shri Prem Nath Bhat and Shri Harji Lal Jad led the activists in Anantnag district to make available drinking water to the grieved people on the streets and to address the problems of both the communities arising due to the closure of markets. Shri Amar Nath Ganjoo and Shri Tika Lal Taploo, along with their activists, took the responsibility of serving the grief-stricken community on the streets and helping the people in general. Similarly, Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, Shri Motilal Malla and Shri Birbal Sahani, along with their band of workers, took the lead and came out on the streets in Baramulla and Kupwara districts to share the grief of the Muslim Community and offer them a helping hand to solve their day-to-day problems arising due to the widespread protests



against the unholy act. The Vivekananda society thus became the symbol of communal harmony. B.N. Malick, the Head of the Intelligence Bureau and Shri Laxman Das Thakur, the Inspector General of police, traced the Moi-e-Maqaddas (the holy relic) in January 1964, and the tension was diffused.

Pandit Amarnath lived in Handwara till the end of the year 1966. Kupwara and Baramulla came under the Baramulla district. As he was responsible for inter-district activities of the school, students from other districts also knew him and loved him. Other people in the district also came to know him and respected him because of his involvement in the Vivekananda Society. Through this society, he got in touch with Niranjana Nath Kaul, Mohan Lal Sopory, Shibbanjee Thathoo and Dr Lidhoo. With the help of all these people, he was able to unite Hindus in the entire district and help them overcome the fear in their minds because of being in the minority over the years. In the entire district, all festivals were celebrated with a lot of pomp and fervour. He used to tour the entire district. The headquarter was in Seer Jagir, and all functions were conducted there. They distributed the photos and booklets of Swami Vivekananda in every home. Shri Gopi Nath Garyali, a senior advocate, was the President of this society. Shri Amarnath Ganjoo was the General Secretary.

On Saturdays, Amarnath used to go to Seer Jagir directly after working hours and boost the morale of the natives in these villages. One more person, Shri Gopi Nath Ji, also used to come along with him. Later in 1965, he went alone to many villages. One day when he was touring a far-off village alone in Kupwara, he saw one house painted green. From the same house came out a young woman in Hindu attire; he was surprised to see this woman in a



Muslim home. When he went inside the house, he found that it was a Hindu family. Upon asking why their house was painted green, they replied that they were the only Hindu family in the village and that the green colour made them feel safer. Not only this, but they also had some clothes, which were Muslim



costumes which they wore whenever they sensed danger. They had been living in fear ever since the attack of the Kabalis (raiders). This was the time of Shri Sadik Sahab's rule (Congress rule). In 1965 there was also a rumour that the Kabalis had once again attacked. There was a place called Chakinandram in Pattan towards Tangmarg. This place was inhabited by Brahmins and Rajputs, and there was no other community living there. They were themselves the labourers, landlords and traders. He had tried to unite all these villages through the Vivekananda Society by conducting Ramayana Satsang. They organized various camps in Tikar, Kandi, Sopore and Baramulla.

During his long stay at Handwara from 1960 onwards, Pandit Vaishnavi had already started touring the villages in north Kashmir on a cycle, on foot and using public transport to build the confidence of the Pandit community, whose confidence had shattered since 1947. More so after 1950, when harsh political decisions were taken by the Government of the day, such as land to tillers and Government jobs on a population basis in the J&K State. The Vivekananda Society became the branch of Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh, and as such, the organization actively worked towards inculcating patriotism among the masses and starting from 1970, the RSS gained momentum in Kashmir.

The local population of Handwara held Pandit Vaishnavi in high esteem for his secular credentials. In 1964 during his tenure in Handwara, he directed his family members at Srinagar to accommodate Shri Khazar Mohammad, a student from Handwara Higher Secondary School, in his house at Chattabal as he had got admission to Regional Engineering College, Srinagar and was waiting to be allotted a hostel. Shri Khazar Mohammad, as an orthodox, had to prepare his meals himself and offer daily Namaz in a room in Amarnath's house at Srinagar Chattabal. The family members accepted him gladly and arranged his stay in Amarnath's room. Thus, daily Pooja and Namaz were taking place in the same house. This is an example of Amarnath's humanistic approach to social problems.



In 1966, Pandit Vaishnavi was transferred from Handwara to M.P. Higher Secondary School Bagh-e-Dilawar Khan, Srinagar. It was to his good luck that his one-time revered and trusted teacher Pandit Sham Lal Madan, was the principal at the time of his joining. The Indo-Pak war of 1965 had convinced Pandit Vaishnavi that India needed a tough Prime Minister, and in Lal Bahadur Shastri's personality, who was the Prime Minister of India at that time, he found toughness; but his mysterious death pained him equally.

Before the war started, Pakistan had sent infiltrators to Kashmir who were either killed or dragged out by the Indian forces. The information about the infiltration bid was given by one Shri Amarchand from a remote village for the first time, which helped the forces to act on time. He was unfortunately killed by the infiltrators. It was the second time that Amarnath was in a state of shock when the Indian Prime Minister, Mr. Lal Bahadur Shastri, died in Tashkent, which he felt was not a natural death. The first time he was shocked by the death of Dr Shyama Prasad Mukherjee in 1953 when he also died under mysterious circumstances in Kashmir.

Dr Shyama Prasad Mukherjee was arrested at Ravi Bridge after crossing Punjab in May 1953 along with two others, Vaid Guru Dutt, a writer, and Shri Teik Chand, the private secretary of Dr Mukherjee. They were lodged in the huts of gardeners at Nishat Garden. Many visitors had started to reach the spot, a place of historical importance. Dr Shyama Prasad Mukherjee expired during detention in Srinagar on the night of 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1953 in circumstances shrouded under mystery. No enquiry was held in the matter despite the demand made by the mother of Dr. Mukherjee, the Bhartiya Jan Sangh and Chief Minister of Bengal, Dr B.C. Roy. More than six lac people attended the funeral procession of Dr Mukherjee in Calcutta. In Jammu and the rest of the country, protest rallies were held, and the agitation flared up, resulting in mass arrests, Satyagrahas and killings in various towns and streets of the country. At least 15 youths were killed, and thousands were arrested in Jammu alone.



Dr Mukherjee had been advised by Shri Golwalkar, the RSS Sangh Chalak, not to visit Kashmir as it might prove disastrous for him. Pandit Amaranth said that Shri Golwalkar had suspected some foul play. Pandit Amaranth disclosed that Dr Mukherjee's mother had written an open letter to the then Prime Minister of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, in which she had held him responsible for her son's death in Kashmir. It is also equally interesting to mention here that Shri Golwalkar had warned Shastri ji that his leaving the country at that juncture might not be safe for him. Pandit Amaranth also disclosed this, who said that Shri Golwalkar was keenly watching the negativities prevalent in Indian politics during those days.

### Strengthening Political Conviction – Meeting L K Advani & Atal Bihari Vajpayee

Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi was impressed by the integral humanism of Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyay. His economic and political thought had made an impact on Pandit Vaishnavi. Deen Dayal was vitally concerned with the problems of national reconstruction. He differed from the Gandhian School of thought in as much as he laid maximum stress on mechanization. However, he opposed the wholesale transportation of technology and industrial structures from the West. He stood for the people sector and said the private and the public sector should be made mutually complementary, there is ample scope for the development of both under the present conditions. His integral humanism meant that the body, mind, intelligence and soul of a person must not be thought of separately. It meant the flowering of the human consciousness into universal consciousness. Ever since 1960, Amarnath, despite being in Government service, had made inroads into state politics by attending the crucial meetings of the state unit of Bhartiya Jan Sangh headed by Pandit Prem Nath Dogra, the Doyen of state's social-political activities. Amarnath was also in contact with leaders like Shri Rishi Kumar Kaushal, Shri Sheik Abdul Rehman, Shri Ram Nath Balgotra, Shri Chaman Lal Gupta and Shri Tika Lal Taploo. He came in contact with the think tanks of the state RSS leaders,



namely, Dr Om Prakash Mengi, Sham Lal Sharma, Shri Dev Raj and Indresh Kumar, the state pracharak of RSS in J&K and Himachal Pradesh. Several RSS and BJP leaders from Delhi used to come to the valley and would deliberate with him on various issues. The leaders from Delhi who visited his house from time to time include Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Prof. Balraj Madhok, Shri Kidar Nath Sahani and Shri L.K. Advani.



With L K Advani

I am reminded of an event which has relevance in so far as the meetings of the leaders of Sang Parivar are concerned, which were taking place at Srinagar in which Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi was actively participating. It was the 12th of June in the year 1963. A meeting of the RSS and BJP leaders was held from 10 am to noon at the residence of Pandit Vaishnavi at 156 Bagisundar Bala, Chattabal, Srinagar. The meeting was attended, among others, by Shri LK Advani, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Shri Balraj Madhok, Shri Madhav Rao Mulley, Shri Rishi Kumar Kaushal, Shri Amar Nath Ganjoo and Pandit Vaishnavi. After the meeting, lunch was served by Pandit Vaishnavi purely in Kashmiri style at his residence. I was a vegetarian in lunch. The moment fried



and cooked red potatoes (Kashmiri Dum Aloo) were served to Vajpayee Ji, he at once took off his hand from the thali, saying, "Egg!" Shri Balraj Madhok quickly responded to Shri Vajpayee's remarks and said that it is not an egg but a potato, Dum Aloo, as they call it, in Kashmiri. Vajpayee Ji had a smile and tasted the dish. While tasting it, he remarked that it was not 'Dum Aloo' but 'Dam Nikaloo' (taking his breath away). "It is very hot and spicy, but it tastes good." All those present had a hearty laugh, and all enjoyed the lunch.

Pandit Vaishnavi's social and political mission of working for the harmony and the brotherhood of the various communities in the Jammu and Kashmir State continued unabated. He was a source of inspiration for the different communities who learnt from him to live in harmony with each other. He never expected an endorsement from the people for his doings.

### Kashmiri Pandit Agitation- 1967

In June 1967, Parmeshwari, a Kashmiri Pandit girl working in Government Co-operative Department in Srinagar, was harassed in the Department. She was hardly 17 years old and was working there as a cashier. She had lost her father at a very young age, and except for her mother, there was none to look after her in the family. Suddenly it so happened that continuously for months together, she found her cash short at the end of the day. However, a Muslim employee came forward to deposit the money in the departmental account from his pocket after the close of the day's account. This was how a situation was created to trap the girl, and the employee was now impressing on her that he was her saviour. No one in the department bothered to move forward and enquire about the mischief played with the girl, who was quite innocent. However, it appeared to be a part of a conspiracy later on as the boy finally abducted her and remained hidden for many days and married her secretly. Parmeshwari's mother filed a complaint with the police to get her daughter restored. Her complaint was not honoured by the police. However, the Kashmiri Pandit Community launched an agitation under the leadership of the All-State Kashmiri Pandit Conference Yuvak Sabha Sheetal Nath, with



Pandit Shiv Narayan Fotedar as its President. A Hindu action committee was formed to lead this mass movement, and Pandit Vaishnavi was the Chief Activist of this action committee. Shri Amarnath Ganjoo, Shri Tika Lal Taploo and all other Swayam Saveks of RSS were its active participants. Pandit Vaishnavi arranged Satyagraha of volunteers who continued daily satyagraha for two months. The other activists of the movement who were in the limelight, among others, were Pandit S. N. Kachroo, Pandit Gopi Krishan Koul, who was the President of Action Committee, Pandit Prem Nath Gasi, who was the Vice President of Action Committee, and Pandit Jagan Nath Kheibry. All leaders were addressing huge public meetings in the Sheetal Nath in the evening hours regularly, and Pandit Vaishnavi would always start his lecture with 'JAI KARA HAR HAR MAHADEV.' Many arrests were made, and people were lathi-charged on the roads. Sarva Shri Maharaj Krishen Razdan, A. K. Khushoo, Hriday Nath Mattoo, Lassa Koul Badami, Gopi Nath Handoo and many others were killed. A self-immolation bid by Shri Pushkarnath Vakil was foiled, and he was arrested. Hundreds were wounded. Pandit Jagan Nath Kheibry, a daring journalist, took the lead in publishing such Human Rights Violation details in and outside the state in leading newspapers. The agitation aimed at pressurizing the Government to hand over the girl to her parents in an impartial way to save minority interests.

During the said summer agitation, starting from the historical Sheetal Nath maidan of Srinagar, Vaishnavi several times took out his turban from his head and got it drenched in the water pot from the neighbouring houses and wiped the tears of the agitators whose eyes were sore due to the teargas shells busted by the police.

In the meantime, Prof. Balraj Madhok, President of Bhartiya Jan Sangh, reached Srinagar and addressed the gatherings telling the anti-Indian forces who were active at that time to leave Kashmir in case they did not want to live under the Indian Flag in Kashmir. The visit of Prof. Madhok was followed by the visit of Shri C. Rajeshwar Rao, a Polit Bureau member of the CPI (M). Pandit Moti Lal Misri, a local Marxist leader, also attended his meeting with the



action committee members at Hotel Taj at Maisuma Bazar near Amirakadal in August 1967. The meeting ended in a very confusing way because Shri Rajeshwar Rao termed the agitation purely communal. This was rebutted by Pandit Vaishnavi. When Rajeshwar Rao continued to harp his tune Pandit Vaishnavi stood up like a revolutionary and told him to listen to the vows of the Pandit community or else leave the hall. Shri Rajeshwar Rao continued to speak again, making Pandit Vaishnavi force Shri Rao to leave. Shri Y.B. Chavan, then Home Minister of India, entered the Valley within a few days and started negotiations with the Kashmiri Pandit leadership, taking into confidence the then Chief Minister Shri Ghulam Mohammad Sadiq and Shri D.P. Dhar. The politicians who were representing the Government ultimately played a deceitful role, and the agitation was called off under compulsion by the action committee.

### Delhi Satyagraha

In October 1967, Vaishnavi left for Delhi with a band of activists (almost all from the Sangh), which included Shri Balaji Bindroo, Shri Ashok Kumar Braroo, Shri Chuni Lal Koul, Smt Dulari Zadoo, Janak Rani Jagyasu and Shri Balkrishan Seru. On their arrival at the Hindu Mahasabha office, the food fell short, so there were no chapattis available for them. As the team captain, Vaishnavi Ji, ordered them to buy the wheat from the market and boiled it to make it edible. His dictum was followed, and they ate boiled wheat after being without food for two days. Before the food was served, Vaishnavi Ji addressed them, "We are on our mission to save our Dharma and our county, so while dedicating ourselves to the said cause, we may have to miss meals or even digest pebbles." The Satyagrahis thus courted arrest outside Tihar Jail just after three days of stay at the Hindu Mahasabha office in New Delhi. The Satyagraha was led by Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, and while courting arrest, they raised slogans "Kashmir Bachao, Desh Bachao". Inside Tihar Jail, Vaishnavi Ji couldn't bear to see that some underprivileged prisoners were not getting meals two times, so he stood up for them and raised his voice to highlight their cause.



In December 1967, he and Shri Amarnath Ganjoo met Gen. B.M. Kaul. They narrated to him the situation of Kashmiri Pandits in Kashmir viz-a-viz, the role of international media and the kidnapping of the girl. They explained to him the ill-treatment of Pandits at the hands of the government. He felt sad after learning about the entire situation, his eyes were filled with tears, and tears rolled down his cheeks. Vaishnavi Ji and Shri Ganjoo looked at each other, thinking that perhaps they had said something inappropriate. Upon asking the reason for his tears, he replied that he had been an Intelligence Brigadier in Kashmir, and based on his experience, he could say that the worst would happen in Kashmir; whatever was happening was nothing. He said that it was better that Pandits move out of Kashmir, and in case they still wanted to live there, then each one had to become a commando.

### Sabotage That Spoiled the Show

Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi revealed, on being asked about the result of the Kashmiri Pandit Agitation of 1967, that the State Government continued its efforts to dupe the Central Government, anti-Indian elements continued to fish in these troubled waters, and the bait was provided by the State Government. Mr Sadiq, the then Chief Minister, made a statement in the State Assembly on 31<sup>st</sup> August 1967, which conveyed a lack of appreciation of the situation, though, at the same time, he could not hide that his government had been criticised by the majority Community and charged with following a soft line. He confirmed that on 24<sup>th</sup> August, a section of Muslims had organised a procession & demonstrations in protest.

Mr Sadiq's statement was full of platitudes and, at the same time, threatened that no quarter would be shown to the elements (an indirect reference to Kashmir Pandits) seeking to create an atmosphere of tension. As to the abducted girl, all he had to say was that the case was already before the Court of law and that it was his duty to allow the law to take its course in an atmosphere of peace and tranquillity. The court had yet to settle the



Preliminaries regarding the bereaved mother's complaint- whether she should be heard in the presence of the abductor or not. The dilatory process indicated the intention behind this case.

Political tussles within the ruling party and certain elements of the so-called Congress party continued. The rule of law became causality. In such a situation, the Union Home Minister Shri Y.B. Chavan arrived in Srinagar on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1967. The Kashmir Hindu Action Committee expected that his visit would give the central leadership and the Government an understanding of the implications of the unfortunate and tragic Parmeshwari episode in Srinagar. A memorandum was submitted to him by the Committee on the day of his arrival. The events leading to the abduction of the girl and the mishandling of the case, coupled with the neglect of the Government, were brought to his notice, indicating the immediate demands for an honourable settlement. The memorandum constituted the following:

1. The abducted girl to be restored to her widowed mother.
2. Judicial probe to be ordered into the conduct of the investigating agency connected with the abduction case and into the police excesses all through, and also the suspension of the concerned officers before the probe starts.
3. Unconditional release of all detainees connected with this agitation and withdrawal of any contemplated or already taken action against Government servants.
4. Compensation to the families of the deceased and injured and families affected by loot and arson.
5. Restoration of law and order to ensure the security of minorities.
6. Enquiry into the grievances of the minority by a High-Power Tribunal headed by a High Court Judge.



Immediately after this, Amarnath opened the pages of his diary and read as under:

There were discussions throughout the day and late in the night of 2<sup>nd</sup> Sept. Later, a deputation of the Hindu Action Committee had a second round of talks with Shri Chavan. This was all overboard, but behind the scenes, the members of the 'Control Room' of the Government presented in the garb of 'Peace Living Citizens' another memorandum, dated 2<sup>nd</sup> Sept. 1967, to Shri Chavan. They greeted Mr Chavan and appreciated him for his stirring revelations and disclosures, which he was alleged to have made only two days ago in New Delhi, about the tragic and deplorable incidents of Ranchi. The memorandum, as presented to Shri Chavan, was compiled and printed within two days. It constituted the data regarding the percentages of different communities in services and admissions, especially to the Regional Engineering College, Srinagar. It is no wonder that the "Peace Living Citizens" could in no time get these figures from the Government records, as the Government agency itself was behind all this. Ironically, the unfortunate abduction of the minor Hindu orphan girl was mentioned as "The conversion to Islam and the marriage of a Kashmiri Pandit girl with a Muslim is a very trivial matter in our normal life and could not and should not have caused a sizeable conflagration."

Unwittingly, these self-righteous "Peace Loving Citizens" mentioned everything atrocious that the majority community had been engaged in, with the only difference being that they mentioned Kashmiri Pandits as the perpetrators of all those atrocities. In their eagerness to influence the opinion of Shri Y.B. Chavan, they went to the extent of mentioning the following in their Memorandum:

"The actual truth is that they (Kashmiri Pandits) have spared no effort to wipe out the Muslim population by resorting to violence. Unfortunately, the State Government has also suppressed many of the glaring activities of incendiarism in which the Kashmiri Pandit community has engaged itself during the last two or three weeks or so. Huge stocks of arms and ammunition have been



recovered from temples and houses, and large truckloads of armaments have been seized, but neither the Kashmir Radio nor the information department has a word to say about the disclosures, although there is hardly any person in the State who is not aware of the matter.” How the truckloads of arms and ammunition were disposed of by the State Government has not been brought to light by the “Peace Loving Citizens.”

On the same date, i.e. 2<sup>nd</sup> Sept. 1967, a printed appeal from Khawaja Ali Shah, Chairman Idara Auqafe-Islamia, Jammu and Kashmir and ex-President Plebiscite Front, also an ex-Minister of Revenue of Sheikh Abdullah’s time, issued to the address of Prime Minister, wherein the abduction case is stated as:

Recently an event has taken which, from whatever point of view it is looked upon, was of common occurrence but has been exploited in a way which has shaken to its foundation the peace in the country and the confidence of the majority community very deeply and rudely. A Kashmiri Pandit girl has married a Muslim after having fulfilled legal formalities. There have been well-known inter-communal marriage cases in Kashmir which caused no tension or excitement. Why the present case was treated as an exception passes our comprehension, particularly when it was sub-judice and when judicial findings would have revealed the true position. It appears that the know-how in this particular case must have been determined by some ulterior motive which was used as a camouflage.” While making similar flagrant statements in the appeal, Khawaja Ali Shah made a point to release Sheikh Abdullah.

The above extracts from the Memorandum of the “Peace Loving Citizens” and the appeal of Khawaja Ali Shah indicated the mentality of the majority community about the minority. The State Government, through the Department of Information issued on 3<sup>rd</sup> Sept. 1967, the following joint communiqué:

On the termination of the visit of the Union Home Minister, Shri Y.B. Chavan, to Srinagar, the following agreed statement was issued: The



representative of the Hindu Action Committee called on the Union Home Minister in Srinagar on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1967 and placed before him various matters relating to the movement which they had launched recently. The Union Home Minister appealed to them that an endeavour should be made to create an atmosphere of peace and order for a cool and dispassionate understanding and examination of all the issues. For this purpose, he earnestly advised them to withdraw the agitation.

It may be recalled that the present agitation began on a complaint about the alleged abduction of a minor girl, Kumari Parmeshwari Handoo. The Union Home Minister advised the matter of an inquiry before a Court of law. Everyone would do well to allow due processes of law to take its normal course. Allegations have been made about the excesses committed by the Police in dealing with the agitation, and it was desired that the Union Home Minister choose the manner and method in which such allegations are properly examined. The State Government has already reiterated that in a democracy, it is the right of every citizen to ventilate grievances, and the Government must always ensure redressal wherever indicated. The Chief Minister has held out this assurance more than once in his statements both in and outside the State Legislature.

The action committee also expressed their concern about the various disabilities and difficulties which their community had been facing in matters of economic development, employment and education opportunities. The Chief Minister had already announced his decision to constitute a committee which would examine all these and related matters. Soon after a Memorandum on this subject was made available to the Chief Minister by the Action Committee, the State Government would set up such a committee as would command universal confidence.



The government issued the following statement:

The Action Committee has agreed, in response to the appeal made by the Union Home Minister, to suspend their agitation to create an atmosphere of peace and tranquillity. The Chief Minister has indicated that the State Government would make the consequential responsive gesture of releasing all the persons arrested and detained in connection with the agitation, as also order the withdrawal of any punitive action which may have been taken or was in the process of being taken regarding persons connected with this movement.

*“The Union Home Minister and the Chief Minister wish to take this opportunity of appealing to the people of Jammu & Kashmir State to preserve harmony and peace amongst various communities, a tradition which has been our proudest and most valued possession. They would like to reiterate the desire of the Government of India and that of the State Government to ensure that all sections and classes of people equally enjoy the rights and privileges enshrined in our democratic constitution. In this context, it is our sacred duty to assure the minority communities in our country a sense of security and equal participation.”*

The Union Home Minister held a Press Conference in Srinagar immediately after he met a delegation of the United Muslim Front and had discussions with them. This was the new “Control Room”. According to the discussions and the statement of the Union Home Minister and the State Chief Minister, the Union Home Minister was to come to Srinagar again on or before 13<sup>th</sup> Sept., i.e. ten days after his departure on 3<sup>rd</sup> Sept.



During this period, the abducted girl was to be separated from the abductor, kept in the custody of her natural guardian, the mother or a third party, and the court would take its course for deciding the issue. This did not happen as the members of the "Control Room" started working up the majority community to defeat the very agreement arrived at by the Central Government and the State Government with the Hindu Action Committee. Shri Chavan did not come to Srinagar again and took cover behind the Chinese fracas at Nathula. This was how the State and the Central Governments hobnobbed together to deceive the Hindus of Kashmir.

### Few Interesting Events of the Agitation

One day, policemen in plain clothes scattered all over Sheetal Nath planned to somehow arrest Vaishnavi Ji. However, all his workers were keeping an eye on the situation and constantly protecting him. They exchanged his red turban with a black cap. His turban was put to use by Shri Prem Nath Ji Gasi. When the lecture was over, they gave him a muffler to wrap around his neck and a cigarette which was already lit. He kept the cigarette between his lips. He had never smoked a cigarette before. He mingled in the crowd along with his friend Shri Pushkar Nath Karnel and came out of the building, and entered a lane. All the policemen followed Shri Gasi because of the turban. Vaishnavi Ji suspected police in the lane they were walking, and he immediately stepped into a house. As it was summertime in Kashmir, the family was staying on the third floor. In summers, there was a practice of shifting the living to the top floor. They were happy to see him and respectfully offered him a place to sit. Their daughter-in-law had given birth to a baby, and she was lying on a bed under the mosquito net along with her baby. As he sat, the water delivery person climbed the stairs. Suspecting that the person might inform the police, the old lady asked her daughter-in-law to move out of the bed with the baby and instead asked Vaishnavi Ji to occupy the bed and cover himself under the quilt. When the water delivery person left, they returned to their original



positions. He spent some time with them over a cup of tea and left. He stayed overnight at a friend's place who was a relative of Shri Karneil.

A day before this incident, when a public address was happening at Sheetal Nath, Vaishnavi Ji saw a jeep coming in reverse that stopped near the gate. Five men got down from the jeep. One person came and asked Vaishnavi Ji to meet him. As he walked down the stairs, two children came running to him, clinging to his legs and crying. They did not let him move. They were so young that they could not speak to him properly. They told him not to go out as those men were from the police and that they would arrest him. Seeing this, the five men in the jeep went away. Afterwards, the children told him the whole incident that they had witnessed. They had heard one man saying to the other four to stand at a certain point which he marked with a line, and they would send one person for Vaishnavi Ji, who would bring him outside the building under some pretext. As he reached that line, the four men would capture and take him away in the jeep. Those children saved him from getting arrested that day.

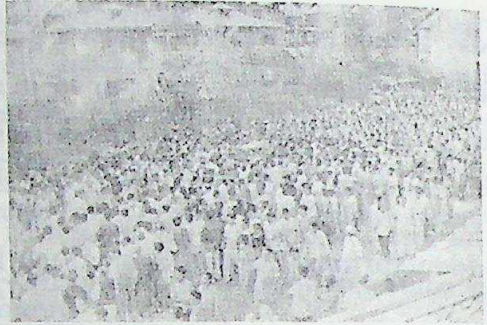
In 1968, Pandit Vaishnavi attended a conference of the All India Hindu Maha Sabha at Baroda in Gujarat, where he narrated the woeful tragedies of Kashmir especially of the Kashmiri Pandit Community who had suffered much since 1947.



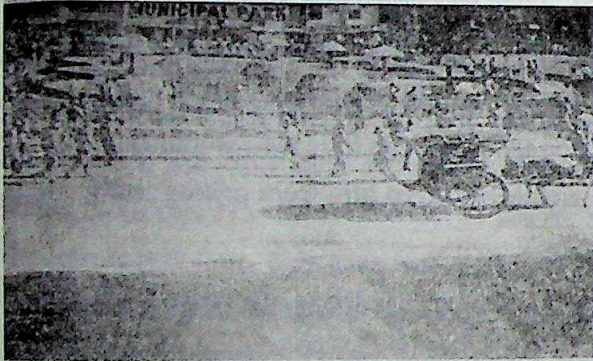
### Photo Album of the KP Agitation (1967)



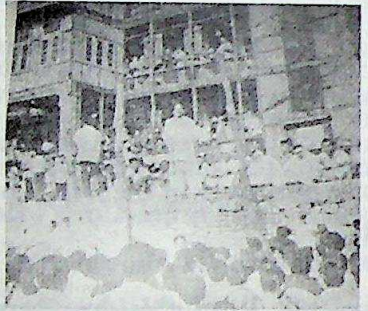
"Shaheed" MAHARAJ KISHEN RAZDAN  
victim of 25th August inhuman Police Brutali



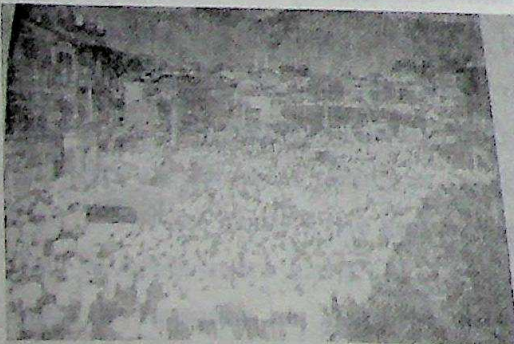
Joint Funeral Procession of Two "Shaheeds" on 27th August  
Later stoned by hooligans near Cremation Ground.



A Further Scene of Police atrocities on August 15th.



Shri Premnath Ghosi, Vice President  
Kashmir Hindu Action Committee  
addressing a public meeting.



A huge crowd giving send off to Satyagrahis  
at Harisingh High Street on 18th August.



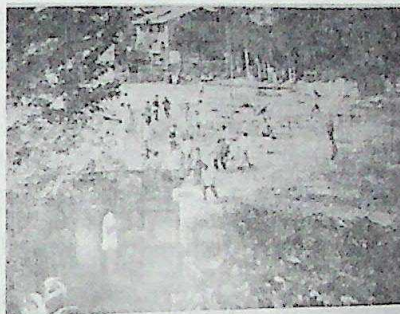
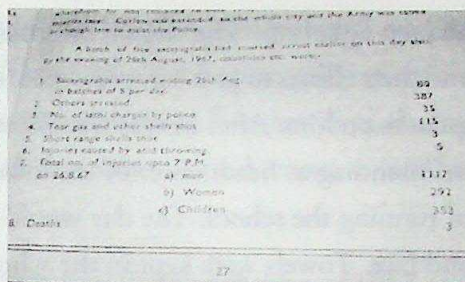
Tongue of a Cow cut  
to provoke communal tension

G.M. College of Education  
Raipur, Pantala  
Jammu.

CC-O. Agamniyam Digital Preservation Foundation

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Dated... 5/8/2022





clice hirelings collecting Stones for pelting  
Shitainath crowd on 25th august.

In the middle of 1969, Pandit Vaishnavi was transferred to Leh, Ladakh, as a matter of punishment for his involvement in the Kashmiri Pandit agitation. Before him, Shri Moti Lal Zadu had been in Leh as a teacher at the Buddhist School of Education for a short period. He had weaned away the Buddhist monks from the Kargil influence, whereby the conversion of Buddhists to the Shiya faith had taken place, changing the demography of Ladakh. With the arrival of Pandit Vaishnavi in Leh, a popular uprising started. The same gave birth to a local political organization of the Buddhist community. This was later merged with the All-India Bhartiya Jan Sangh. The agitators launched a great agitation wherein the office of the Divisional Commissioner was put on fire. Pandit Vaishnavi's active role in the agitation made authorities transfer him to Anantnag district in 1970. This agitation paved the way for forming the Ladakh Buddhist Association permanently. It may be recalled here that attempts were made to assassinate Shri Vaishnavi by the miscreants during the



Ladakh agitation. The timely information gathered by the Buddhist activists and their efforts to give complete security to Amarnath averted such murderous assaults on him. After he was transferred from Leh, he was placed at Marhama in Anantnag as headmaster of the lower middle school. He had a unique way of running the school. The day would start with children washing their hands and face. Towels were kept in the school. Then after the prayer, classes would start. During the prayer, brief lectures were delivered on topics which would benefit students in developing a wholesome personality. After school time, sports activities were conducted. Once a month, the Central Information Department would make arrangements for playing audiovisuals, teaching good values through entertainment. Every Friday, the village youth used to play games in pre-designated teams after recess. The whole village was very happy with the school's performance. In six months, the school was looked upon as an ideal school. However, after six months, another person who was a resident of the village was appointed in place of him, and he was transferred to Uttarsu.

In August 1970, Amarnath was arrested in Uttarsu, Anantnag, by the State Government to convict him for his role in the Buddhist agitation in Ladakh. He was taken to Leh under police protection to conduct proceedings against him in the District Magistrate Court in Leh. On his arrival at the Leh bus stop, he was surprised to witness a huge gathering of Buddhists comprising of men and women, young and old, greeting him with the slogans "Master Ji Zindabad". The Buddhists had already received the information about Pandit Vaishnavi Ji's arrest. As soon as he came down from the bus, he was greeted with flowers. Among others, the people who greeted him included Koshak Bakola and Koshak Fiang, the great Buddhist leaders. He was kept in police custody that night, and the next day the court hearing against him began in the District Magistrate Court. On the same day, Pandit Tika Lal Taploo from Srinagar and Thakur Baldev Singh from Jammu, both leading lawyers of the state, entered the court premises to defend Pandit Vaishnavi. The court proceedings continued for four days, and Pandit Vaishnavi was acquitted with honour by the magistrate after hearing both sides during these four days. The



news of his acquittal spread in Leh town, and people again gathered outside the court premises within minutes. There was jubilation, and everyone proclaimed him their political Guru. He was with them for a few days, during which he attended their celebrations, and then returned to Uttarsu to join his duty.

It is pertinent to mention here that the Kashmiri Pandit agitation of 1967 and the Ladakh Buddhist movement of 1968 impacted the working of the state's government. This was evident when the state Government set up three commissions, namely the Gajandhar Gadkar Commission, Dayal Commission and Kohli Commission, respectively. The Gajandhar Gadkar Commission aimed to see and remove regional disparities. The Dayal Commission aimed at removing communal disparities. The Kohli Commission was meant to find out the causes and the atrocities committed upon the Kashmiri Pandit Community during their agitation in 1967. This also aimed at looking into the grievances of the Kashmiri Pandit community and the reasons for a step-motherly treatment of the Government towards them since 1947. Unfortunately, the Kohli Commission report could not be made public even until today.

### Simmering Unrest—Vaishnavi Appointed Chief of RSS in Kashmir

Amarnath was transferred from Anantnag district to Srinagar district in 1971. He was posted at Zadibal High School, Soura, till his retirement in 1980. As already stated, during his service period, he got a chance to work with Shri Saduddin, his one-time Headmaster and associated with the Jamaati-Islamia organization. Both of them were friendly with each other. Amarnath had high regard for him for his simple living and plain speaking. The interpretation of Islam as given by him had impressed Amarnath, and he would say that all religions preach service to mankind.

The year 1971 witnessed a war between India and Pakistan wherein India had made sufficient gains with respect to winning territories from Pakistan, paving the way for the creation of Bangladesh as a separate nation. Under these



circumstances, ninety thousand Pakistani soldiers had become war prisoners and were under the captivity of the Indian Army. Shri Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, was eager to free his war prisoners from Indian occupation. A conference was held in Shimla, attended by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Indira Gandhi immediately after the war. An agreement was arrived at in which Pakistan succeeded in getting lost territories back from India and got its ninety thousand prisoners freed from India. Bhutto also got success in keeping the Kashmir issues alive.

Amarnath was pained to learn about the blunder which the Indian Prime Minister had committed by arriving at such type of agreement. He remarked, "What our soldiers won in war, our politicians lost it on the table."

After the war with Pakistan, there was again a rumour that the Pakistani army had made headway towards Srinagar. Therefore, Pandits had started selling their homes and land in some villages. Amarnath used to visit the villages and assure them it was just a rumour and that the Pakistani army was nowhere close. He gave them assurances so that they did not sell their property. While touring villages and visiting people's homes, he reached one house where he had to stay at eight at night. He was carrying a bag with some books and photos of Swami Vivekananda. When he got in, they looked at each other with worried expressions. The reason was that they had no vegetables to cook at that time. Hindus have a custom of not plucking any leaves or flowers from the plants at night. Therefore, they could not get vegetables from their garden. They stocked potatoes and dals, but unfortunately, that stock was exhausted. They were quite worried about what they would offer to the guest. He could determine the reason for their worry and told them that he had stopped eating various vegetables at different pilgrimages and was a vegetarian. He told them to cook just rice and get some hot water. He said that he would explain later as to what was to be done with the water. When they got these two things, he asked for some salt and red pepper. He put both in the water, mixed it with rice, and ate it. This was a new experience for him. This happened in a few more places, in some poor households.



He met the Divisional Commander of the Army of Baramulla Division and told him about the fear that people still had about the Pakistani invasion. He requested him to do something about it. After about two weeks, he was returning after his morning walk in Handwara, and he saw the Army marching in wardress. There was a whistle, and all of them lay down, and another whistle, and they all got up. The Subedar came to Amarnath and greeted him. He introduced himself and told him that they would conduct such exercises for one month to help people overcome their fear and that this was being done as a consequence of his meeting with the Divisional Commander.

Amarnath felt great satisfaction in helping people. The sole reason why he chose to become a teacher was that he wished to make a positive difference in the world around him. As mentioned earlier, he was a teacher by choice. He could have been a senior officer in the Army, an engineer with CPWD or a railway official, as he had received job offers from all these places, but his passion was teaching. He believed that a teaching job is a mission and not a profession. He got the inspiration for being a teacher from RSS. It taught him all the values that he possessed, of serving others and not succumbing to the habits of drinking or smoking and being a vegetarian. He loved people from all religious communities Sikhs, Buddhists, Christians, Muslims and Hindus. He had never kept it hidden that he was an RSS man.

### Violence at Bhairav Temple, Chattabal: Meeting with Mrs. Indira Gandhi

In April 1972, Amarnath was elected the President of the “Bhokhatkishwar Bhairav Nath” Temple Trust, Chattabal. In April 1973, when the said trust had organized a yearly yagna (Hawan) inside the Bhairav Nath Temple premises, the majority community's hooligans started pelting stones at the gatherings performing the yagna. The stones came from all three sides and also from the boats in the river, which formed the fourth side of the Bhairav Nath Temple. This four-cornered attack on the gathering created chaos and disturbance in the performance of the yagna as Pandit Vaishnavi and many



others got head injuries and were taken to the hospital for treatment. The entire celebration came to an end, and the temple has remained closed since then. The next day an elderly Hindu named Shri Hakim succumbed to the injuries and died. Immediately after some days, Pandit Vaishnavi led a delegation of the trustees to the Chief Minister of the State, Shri Gulam Mohammad Sadiq, to apprise him of this tragic incident. However, the state Government remained inactive and did not come to the rescue of the local Hindus of Chhattabal. After that, Pandit Vaishnavi led another delegation of trustees in May 1973 to the Prime Minister of India, Smt. Indira Gandhi. After listening to their vows, the Prime Minister told Pandit Vaishnavi, "Hindus of Kashmir must consider themselves as big brothers to the Kashmiri Muslims and should be courteous to them." It was evident from the irrelevant statement of Smt. Gandhi that she ignored the microscopic minority of Kashmiri Pandits in Kashmir because this minority could not be turned into a vote bank for the Congress Party. Pandit Vaishnavi was now convinced that the appeasement policy of the Congress Government and the pseudo-secular culture of the Congress party, a legacy from Shri Jawaharlal Lal Nehru, could prove suicidal for India in the years to come. The Bhokhatkishwar Bhairava Nath temple of Chhatabal was raised to the ground in the nineties, and Vaishnavi Ji was shocked.

In 1973, the Vivekananda Society of Kashmir, which had become a unit of the RSS organization, was at its peak in Kashmir under the leadership of Shri Amarnath Ganjoo. He was a dedicated soul whose only aim was to spread RSS in Kashmir. It was through this organization that Shri Ganjoo, along with Pandit Vaishnavi, Shri Tikal Lal Taploo and others, made tremendous efforts to consolidate the entire Hindu community of Kashmir and helped them in arranging marriages of the poor and providing medical help to the needy from time to time as a measure to save society from ruin.

It was the month of June 1973 when Pandit Vaishnavi took charge as the Chief of the RSS in Kashmir from Shri Amarnath Ganjoo. Pandit Vaishnavi now became engaged with his RSS task and explained the Hindutva concept to the



general public of Kashmir, expanding his broad-based work sphere of self-service among the masses. He would always say that Hindutva means the unity of Hindus of India to spread its message of brotherhood at large. To him, the countrymen as a whole could be called Hindus irrespective of their caste, colour and creed. He had imbibed his Hindutva concept from Shri M.S. Golwalkar. He would thus say that all the religious communities, such as Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and Christians, should consider that their religious identity is nowhere in contradiction with the word "Hindu", which signifies the nationhood of every Indian born in India and also of those people whose forefathers are Indians.

It may be recalled here that as early as 1944, Shri Omkar Nath Kak, Shri Avtar Krishan Kaw and Shri Makhn Lal Aima were looking after the work of RSS in Anantnag, Baramulla and Srinagar districts, respectively, as Pracharaks and the organization had expanded since then.

Pandit Vaishnavi being the Chief of the RSS in Kashmir Province, revolutionized its work by laying stress on self-discipline, character building and imbibing the qualities of a patriot among the youth through the Shakhas. A group of youngsters who were active in RSS Shakhas were taught to be committed citizens who would look after the miseries of society and attend to those people who were worried on account of multiple reasons.

This group, among others, included Shri Hira Lal Chatta, Shri T. N. Razdan, Shri Bharat Bushan Bhat, Shri Shibn Krishan Pandita, Shri Shibn Krishan Ganjoo, Shri Anupam Koul, Dr Agnishekhar, Shri Ashwani Chhangoo, Shri Ashok Braroo, Shri Ashok Kumar Pandita, Shri Rajinder Prasad Kampassi, Shri Utpal Koul, Shri Pyarey Sudeshi, Shri Opinder Krishan Bhat, Shri Ajay Bharati, Shri Bal Krishan Seeru, Shri Bansi Lal Kachroo, Shri Ajay Chhangoo, Shri Ashok Kaul and many others representing all the districts of the valley. Shri A. N. Ganjoo, Shri Pushkar Nath Karnel, Shri D. P. Koul, Shri H.N. Bhat, Shri Moti Lal Malla, Shri Madan Lal Khushoo, Shri Harji Lal Jad and



Shri Prem Nath Bhat, the leading light from Anantnag, were part of the brigade which Amarnath needed to take along with him.

The prelude to the 1971 war was the hijacking of the Indian Airlines plane "Ganga" by a local Kashmiri Muslim, Shri Hasim Qureshi, at the behest of Maqbool Bhat, who had obtained a fake point 22 pistol, fooling the captain of the plane and the security forces. The plane was taken to Lahore.

After the resounding victory of India over Pakistan in the 1971 war, India and Pakistan had agreed in Shimla that the conflict of Kashmir would be treated as a bilateral matter, and Kashmir was thus moved away from the international scene. Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, while in jail, realized that the demand for a plebiscite was now irrelevant. He, therefore, accepted the offer of Smt. Indira Gandhi to come to the table. Indira Gandhi appointed Shri G. Parthasarthy to negotiate with Sheikh Abdullah. On 13 November 1975, the Kashmir accord was signed between Mohammad Afzal Beig and G. Parthasarathy. By dint of this agreement, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah took over as the Chief Minister of J&K State in early 1975.

#### Mid-night Arrest – Emergency is Declared in 1975

In June 1975, due to the verdict of the Allahabad High Court, which was against Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi, an emergency was declared by the President of India. With this, the press and media came under censorship, and the working of all the opposition parties came under the scrutiny of the Government of India. Dictatorial conditions prevailed in the entire country. Twenty-three organizations, including the RSS, were banned. On the 21st of June 1975, there was a midnight knock on the door of Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, and he was arrested. All the prominent leaders of almost all the opposition parties were also arrested throughout India during the same night. Lok Sangharsh Samiti, under the leadership of Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Narayan, had already started mobilizing the people of India against the dictatorial attitude of the Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi. Satyagraha became the tool



of this organization through which they fought against the tyranny of the times. Along with Pandit Vaishnavi, Shri Hriday Nath Bhat and Shri Pushkar Nath Kernail, too, were arrested. In the last week of November 1975, Amarnath was released on parole for a few days. In the meantime, he prepared the ground for a grand Satyagraha of Bhartiya Jan Sangh and RSS activists at Lal Chowk. Thus, in December, a veteran Bhartiya Jan Sangh leader Shri Tika Lal Taploo, Shri Madan Lal Khushu and Shri Shibhan Krishan Pandita courted arrest at the historical Lal Chowk of Srinagar as a part of the Lok Sangharsh Samiti movement. The same evening, police knocked at



the door of Pandit Vaishnavi. He surprised the police with his absence as he slipped into his neighbour's house. The police personnel could not trace him throughout the night though they had seen him walking inside the lane connecting to his home. Police had even touched him while trying to catch him, but he managed to slip away. It was only on the second day that Amarnath presented himself in the central jail after the expiry of his parole period. The jailer at the central jail was a Muslim, but he was very virtuous. For the first time, a separate cooking arrangement was made for the Hindus and Muslims as they did not prefer sharing a common kitchen. Amarnath was given a very good place to live, with a big hall with about twenty chairs and a TV; it had a bedroom, a kitchen and a beautiful dining room. He had decorated the room with Chinar leaves. There was a big ground where he used to run every day in the morning wearing his white shorts, white shoes and a white shirt. The CRPF Jawans on duty used to mistake him for an Army Officer, and they used to salute him. He used to make a hundred rounds in the field. Through the window of his room, he could see Hari Parvat and listen to the Aarti every day.



Shibhan Krishan Pandita



The two cooks who cooked for them were army Jawans. One of them was Trivedi, a scholar of Sanskrit and Hindi Language. There were ten other people also who were with him. Many times, food was sent by the families of the incumbents. Vaishnavi Ji instructed them to distribute the food to all. There were two vegetarians in the group, and the rest were non-vegetarians. He used to distribute the food to the cooks from his kitchen rather than the jail kitchen. His peers in jail used to object to it and say that the cooks should eat the jail food. However, he preferred treating them as equals and not as servants. He would say that they were serving them, and it was a debt, and the debt needed to be paid. It was better to pay it off in this lifetime rather than carry it over to another lifetime. Everyone agreed, and they all lived amicably. The other people with them in jail were from the Jamaat-e-Islami, a few communists, some low-paid employees of the transporters union and a lone Hindu Mahasabha leader, Shri Pushkar Nath Kaul Vakil. Each one was allotted one person for help. Three communists were with him, and each one had removed their Janeu (sacred thread worn by Brahmins). One of them used very rough language; out of five words, three used to be rough and unacceptable. Vaishnavi Ji made him realize that his habits of drinking and smoking were not good for him. Moreover, he had two daughters, so his language should be acceptable and civilized. After his tenure in jail, this man changed completely. He stopped drinking and smoking and wore his janeu<sup>5</sup> again. He used to articulate the Gayatri Mantra every day. His wife was quite pleased to see this change in her husband, and sometime later, she came to Amarnath's home to thank him.

One day Shri Pushkar Nath Kernel, Shri Hridaynath Bhat, Shri Pushkar Nath Vakil, Shri M L Kak and Shri ML Pandita were discussing English literature, and the cook Trivedi made an entry and said that he was a fan of Kalidas, he appreciated Kalidas more than Shakespeare. He sang the verses written by Kalidas from Meghdoot, and everyone was spellbound. Once Trivedi was punished by his superior because he left the TV on in their room. The

<sup>5</sup> Sacred thread worn by Brahmins



superintendent ordered him to be hung upside down. When Vaishnavi Ji and others heard this, they asked for Trivedi to be sent back and threatened to go on fast until he was released. Finally, after two hours, Trivedi was sent back, fresh food was cooked, and they ate lunch at 4 PM that day. In his heart, Trivedi respected Amarnath and was grateful to God for bringing him into his life.

The other day it was the birthday of another accomplice who was a very young teacher. That day his eyes were full of tears because he missed his family, though his family sent him meat and rice. He missed the traditional pooja, which would have been conducted at home. Looking at this, Vaishnavi Ji asked Trivedi to cook yellow rice. He read mantras from the religious book and performed pooja. Dum Aloos were cooked along with cheese. The cheese was sent by a relative. Vegetarians and non-vegetarians both enjoyed the feast. In the end, the teacher was very happy and said that the celebration at home would not have been any better. Then onwards, they celebrated everyone's birthday in the same manner. Vaishnavi Ji's birthday also approached during these days, Janmashtami falls two days ahead of his birthday, and the jail superintendent came with a very beautiful bouquet to greet them all on Janmashtami. They kept it behind a curtain till midnight, and at midnight, they removed the curtain at the time of Sri Krishna's birth and offered a prayer to it as there was no idol in the room. The bouquet was extremely beautiful, and they preserved it for many days.

Gradually, many of his accomplices were discharged. The first one to be released was the young teacher. After three and half months, Vaishnavi Ji was alone. Two months after their arrest, almost everyone thought they would never be released and would die inside the prison, as had happened in other parts of India. His accomplices were feeling miserable. Then they thought of praying to Goddess Sharika, Ashtadashbhuj (having eighteen arms), for which they were inspired by Vaishnavi Ji. The Goddess was also his family deity. He always believed that she fulfilled the wishes of those who prayed to her sincerely. Goddess Sharika is considered the governing and residing deity of



Srinagar city. She is in the form of “Shambhoo Shila”, with the front facing Srinagar. Shila has a “Shambhoo Shri Chakra”, a yantra engraved on it with a Bindu in the centre where she resides in her transcendental form. The yantra, Tantra and Mantra are the three forms of worship. Sharika is considered the sole cause and effect in the entire universe, and Devi Aangan is the spot where all the divine Leela and cosmic acts are enacted. Hari Parvat is the most hallowed and sacred area of Kashmir. The oral tradition links the emergence of the entire valley with the divine act of mother Sharika, who incarnated in the form of a bird in Kashmir called “HAER” and lifted a pebble in her beak and dropped it exactly at the spot where the water demon Jalodhbhava was resting. The pebble assumed massive dimensions and crushed the demon under its heavy weight. It is believed that the pebble to this date survives as the Sharika Parbhat and the depression outside the gate of Akbar’s fort near the Ganesh Rock Temple is the place where the demon forced his way out in the process of struggle to free himself from the crushing weight of the pebble that had swollen into gigantic proportion and size. A courtyard constructed on the same hillock by the Mughal Emperor Jalaluddin Akbar in the 16<sup>th</sup> century has a temple of Lord Rama on its premises. A mosque was also built on the same premises in 2008 with the blessing of Shri Ghulam Nabi Azad, then Chief Minister.

Vaishnavi Ji himself decided to pray by performing Maun Vrata (not speaking and observing silence). He wished that no one would disturb him. So, a few days before his associates were freed, he lay down, put on a blanket from the top of his head to the toes, and slept. In the evening, he woke up, had tea and then went outside and sat on the ground. He sat facing the goddess with a broken heart, and like a child, he wished that mother (Goddess) should console them all. As he sat facing the mountain atop which was the temple of the goddess, he had a glimpse of Gurudev, Golwalkar, who was in a cheerful state, saying to him, “No need to observe this silence, go back and be happy, you all will be released.” He went inside and announced to everyone that there was no need to observe silence as Shri Golwalkar had declared that they would come



out of the jail with flying colours. Everyone was surprised to hear this. After two months, Shri Pushkarnath Vakil was released with others, but Amarnath was still jailed for some more time.

When his students learned about his arrest, they came on top of the Hari Parvat and spotted him jogging inside the jail campus. From there, they shouted, "Master Ji, Salaam". The next day they came with baskets of apples to meet him. They had their own apple orchards. The jail authorities asked them to leave the fruits at the gate and leave. The children were, however, adamant about meeting him personally. The jail authorities did not permit them, and the children stood there making noise for a few hours, saying that Amarnath was their teacher and that they wouldn't leave without meeting him personally. Finally, they were allowed inside. Vaishnavi Ji gave some fruits to the jail staff. The jail staff were surprised to know that despite being an RSS man, the children from the Muslim community loved him so much. Vaishnavi Ji also believed that RSS had taught him to love the country and everyone else. He would say that it was the negative publicity promoted by Congress against the RSS to protect its political interests. From the next day, the fruits kept coming regularly, and he used to distribute them among all jail inmates, including hard-core criminals who had also committed murders. They also used to come to meet him once in a while to receive his blessings. He used to jog in the mornings while his students used to wave at him from Hari Parvat, and he used to wave back at them. After six months of being released from jail, he returned to school. A student spotted him when he got off the bus and cried out loud about his arrival. The entire school, including the staff and the students, came out, and some students lifted him on their shoulders. His other friend Shri Heeralal Chatta who was a teacher and was associated with RSS, was also popular among his students. Many of his other RSS colleagues had a similar reputation. He was the only Hindu who got twenty-one thousand Muslim votes from Srinagar and Badgam constituencies without doing any campaigning in the 1996 parliamentary elections.



The previous headmaster had been transferred, and a new person had joined. The headmaster was apprehensive about letting him join. The other teachers, however, insisted that he accept Amarnath's joining report and write that the school has been suffering in his absence as another good art teacher was unavailable. All these comments were written by a Muslim clerk in his service book. After that, the Hindu headmaster did not object.

### Honesty, Boldness and Compassion - His Craze

Before he joined the school, some Hindu teachers created a fear about him. They projected him as someone who was an enemy of Muslims, who could hurt them physically. Therefore, the Muslim staff decided to have their seats separate from Amarnath's. They decided not to talk to him to avoid any conflict; they even had their tea separately. After joining, he behaved in his usual manner. He was friendly and helpful to all. Within a week, the Muslim staff gradually mixed up with him and became friendly. Earlier, the Hindu staff used to make their tea separately, but now they all drank tea together. They used to miss him if he was absent, even for a day. One day when most of the Hindu staff was on leave, one Muslim asked him, "Amarnath, are you a Sanghi?" Amarnath asked back, "Which Sanghi are you referring to? Sanghi means friend, and I am indeed your friend. There are different types of Sanghs or associations such as Handicrafts Sangh, Buddhist Sangh, husband and wife, who are also Sanghis meaning partners. So which Sangh are you talking about?" There was a silence, no one spoke anything. Then he asked, "Are you talking about Jana Sangh? But that is a political party; no government servant can be a part of such organizations, then how can I be a part of the organization?" They looked perplexed and did not say anything. Then he again asked if they were referring to Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh. Then immediately, everyone answered in the affirmative. He said, "Do I look any different from you? Do I have a horrifying face? Do I have different physical features or look like a gangster or a hoodlum?" Then everyone answered that they found him to be a very likeable and sociable, honest and humane person and that they were proud



of him. He told them that he had acquired all his values from the Sangh. This organization prohibited the consumption of alcohol or cigarettes. He told them that it was only after joining this organization that he renounced non-vegetarian food.

While he was teaching in the same school, there was a requirement for an examination in charge who could honestly deliver his responsibility. In the past, various cases of corruption by those who handled the examination had been unearthed. His school headmaster was concerned about this, and one day when he was sharing his concern with Maulvi Badruddin, a staff member and a person with high integrity; Maulvi suggested offering Amarnath the examination responsibility. Maulvi and Amarnath had worked together in Hamdania School in 1948-49, and he knew him very well. He assured the headmaster that he could not find a more sincere person than him because he knew one thing about Amarnath, and that was he felt teaching was a mission and not a profession. He believed that the schools should not be considered a shop where education is sold; instead, they are as pious as a temple. The teaching profession was not just an 'employment to feed', but the role of a teacher was to build moral values in students. The Sangh had taught him that if they have to make a difference in the lives of children, then they should interact with them in the playground. After he took charge of examinations, he created a system which made the answer books anonymous, and the final mark sheet did not mention the names of the students. Marks were finalized only after the due signatures of the concerned teachers. Some teachers who gave higher marks to those students they tutored at home were now unable to do so. Monetary transactions to buy marks were in place then, which stopped with the new system in place. Those who opposed it made it a big communal issue. Some staff members claimed that the Hindu teachers had given good marks to the Hindu students. The issue got politicized, and National Conference workers came and ransacked the school office and took away the registers and cash books. Vaishnavi Ji did not let them take away his documents; he snubbed them, saying that they were not from the Department



of Education and, therefore, they had no right to touch anything in the office. They were afraid of him. Some old and new students came to him and said that the teachers used to make money from them in the name of tuition but did not teach them; instead, they helped them to copy. They were pretty agitated and even offered him their help. He calmed them and sent them back, saying he would call them whenever their help was required. Meanwhile, two teachers were suspended.

The news reached the Director of Education. There was a function to be organized to which Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah had been invited. Vaishnavi planned to call those students who had offered him help earlier. He wished to communicate the truth to Mr. Abdullah during the function. However, the Director of Education visited the school before the scheduled function. He could not open an ink bottle; the bottle broke, and the ink was spilt all over. The next day he came with his staff. The accompanying clerk was wearing an expensive suit. He checked the cashbook and registers of the Hindu teachers only. Then he asked for Amarnath's records and asked one student to take them out of his cupboard and hand them to him. On seeing his cashbook, he questioned Amarnath as to why he did not buy articles in bulk from Amirakadal and why he bought smaller quantities from local shops. On hearing this, he questioned him about the cost of the imported suit, watch and shoes he wore and how he could afford them with the kind of salary he was getting from the government. The headmaster and the Director quietly listened to his argument. He added that he would miss classes for two days if he went to Amirakadal every month. He told him that if he questioned his honesty, there would be a clash between him and the government and that he would be a casualty between the two. He said that he would call the students within seconds, and they would not allow him to leave the school before they revealed the truth about the examination system. On hearing this, the director asked the clerk not to ask any further questions. He returned his cash book and register quietly.



The next day was Janmashtami and Pandit Amarnath had to address a gathering at Sheetal Nath. He told his colleagues to attend his address and see how the two suspended staff members would soon be reinstated after his lecture. The next day he said in his lecture that two teachers were suspended for no fault of theirs. The result was foolproof with no chances of any malpractice as the students' names were anonymous, and sixteen teachers had signed the final marks sheet. He said that there was discrimination against those two teachers, and this should be done away with. After two days, the two suspended teachers were reinstated.

During the same time, the higher secondary board formed a rule that while registering students' names for board examinations, names with titles would not be accepted. There was a student whose name was Peerzada Shazada Maqbool. His name was registered as "Maqbool". His father's name was Peerzaada Maqbool, and he had died. Amarnath himself went to the board office with the boy and requested the officials to change his name to at least Shahzada Maqbool, which was his name; Peerzada was extracted from his father's name. The officials turned a deaf ear. He kept on requesting them to make the change in his name as it would impact his future. All his father's property, pension and G.P. fund papers mentioned his name as Shazaada Maqbool, and if the correct name were not registered in that form, he would not be able to claim all the money left by his father. He requested the staff that the boy's father was no more; therefore, those documents could not be changed anymore. Then the board official somehow agreed to change his name. The boy was thankful to him and was in touch with him even after he left school.

Once, a student rode his bicycle for fun while it was parked in the school. While he was riding, its chain ring broke. The boy was nervous, and he kept the cycle back in its original position. In the evening, when Vaishnavi ji tried to ride the bicycle to go back home, he found the chain ring broken. For the next three days, he observed that the boy who broke the chain was not coming to school, fearing that Master Ji would scold him. He learned from other boys that he was leaving home for school every day but playing somewhere in



between during the day and not coming to school. He was afraid of Amarnath at school and his parents at home. Vaishnavi Ji thought that it was just a matter of twelve rupees he had spent repairing the bicycle, but this could cost the boy his life if he got into the wrong company. On the fourth day, Vaishnavi Ji asked some students to accompany him to his home after school was over. They went inside to call him while he waited outside. The boy started crying. He consoled the boy and asked him to come to school and not worry about what he had done. He said what if his own son would have done this. The next day onwards, the boy started coming to school.

### Saving Hindu Places of Worship

With the lifting of the emergency in 1977 and the parliamentary elections which followed, the country's leadership came into the hands of the Janata Party, which came into existence after the merger of various political parties, including Bhartiya Jana Sangh. Morarji Bai Desai became the Prime Minister of India, having stalwarts like Shri Atal Behari Vajpayee, Shri L. K. Advani, Shri Chandrashekar and many others in his cabinet. In this way, the democratic institutions continued to function; as usual, press censorship was lifted, and leaders were set free.

From 1977, the RSS started working smoothly in the entire country, including Jammu & Kashmir state. In the meantime, the leaders of the Janta Party started coming from New Delhi and approaching various outfits for their support and for spreading its tentacles inside the state of Jammu and Kashmir. So, Shri Amarnath came into contact with Nanaji Deshmukh and other Central leadership of the Janta Party and also with the leaders of the state Janta Party who used to go to his home for entering into the deliberations. Political stalwarts and religious activists Sarva Shri Mirwaiz Molvi Farooq, Ghulam Mohiuddin Kara, Moulana Masoodi, Abdul Ghani Loan, and Smt Jagat Mohini came close to Janta Party.



In August 1977, Pandit Amar Nath Ganjoo and Shri Daya Krishan Babu, both social activists, managed to form a group called Devasthan Suraksha Samiti in Kashmir. This group aimed to look after the Hindu community's places of worship in Kashmir and to keep a vigil on untoward happenings in the valley in the aftermath of the destruction of Temples in North and South Kashmir. Immediately after its formation, the Devasthan Suraksha Samiti organised a big Sant Sammelan in Kashmir at Raghunath Temple at Sathoo Barbarshah. The Maha Mandleshwars of the various regions of the country connected with the Peeths of the Country attended the sammelan. Two important resolutions were passed in such a big congregation. These resolutions warned the Government for its utter negligence of the Hindus and their places of worship in Kashmir. The resolutions said that the Hindus and Sikhs, which were the two central minority communities in Kashmir, should not be discriminated against, and their security and safety should be of utmost importance for the governments both at the centre and in the state.

An insight into this biggest-ever conclave of Kashmiri Hindus organized in August 1978 in Srinagar under the banner of Devasthan Suraksha Samiti revealed that fear psychosis had gripped the inner core of the mind of an average Kashmiri Hindu who was convinced that the air he was breathing had been polluted and the identity of Kashmir had been made to shake hands with an entity that was for all purposes a non-entity for an average Kashmiri who in no case was inclined to break away from his roots.

“The places of worship of Hindus were being desecrated, and efforts were on foot to promote Deobandi Islam in Kashmir.” This and much more was heard from the speakers who addressed the conclave and received applause from the audience.

In 1979 the Government at the Centre changed again and went into the hands of Smt. Indira Gandhi, but there was no problem in Kashmir or any other part of the country regarding the working of the RSS. The Bhartiya Jan Sangh



started to be called Bhartiya Janta Party after the fall of the Janata Party at the Centre.

### Valley Simmers a Decade Prior to the Pandit Exodus

The period from 1980 to 1989 was crucial for those parties and organizations working in the J&K State towards achieving the goal of unity of the country by working in various capacities. The politics in Kashmir was coming under the shadow of the darkness of uncertainty created by anti-national elements. In August 1982, a revered leader of the State, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, died, and with it started a period of uncertainty.

Pandit Vaishnavi was appointed by the Central RSS leadership as a Pracharak of Vishwa Hindu Parishad for the Jammu region in April 1983. Pandit Vaishnavi toured the entire Jammu Province as a VHP Pracharak and tried to mitigate the sufferings of downtrodden sections of the people living in villages and towns. He was dutifully engaged in his mission from 1983 to 1986. In 1984 when militancy was at its peak in Punjab, Pandit Vaishnavi was asked to head the Balidani Jutha of the State of Jammu and Kashmir by the Central leadership of the RSS. RSS had arranged such groups in every state to tour almost all the major towns of Punjab to gain the confidence of the people living there and develop in them the sense of security which had otherwise been jeopardized. This Jutha even faced the wrath of militancy during their Yatra through Punjab.





Balidani Jutha

It was in October 1984 that Amarnath renounced his family life and declared entering into Vanprasth in a big gathering of RSS at Srinagar. The split in the National Conference headed by Dr Farooq Abdullah in 1983 gave birth to the era of political unrest in J&K state. This split group of the party, known as the Inqalabi National Conference, was headed by Shri Ghulam Mohammad Shah, son-in-law of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah. In the meantime, Dr Farooq Abdullah entered into a friendship accord with Moulvi Mohammad Farooq, the chairman of the Awami action committee, a pro-Pakistani outfit. In 1985, Dr Abdullah's government saw its doom, and Shri GM Shah took over the reins of the state. However, this government did not last long, and the state was put under the governor's rule, headed by Shri Jagmohan. It was here that a Muslim cleric Qazi Nisar allegedly dared to arrange the slaughtering of the cow on the day of Janamashtami (the birthday of Lord Krishna) in the famous Lal Chowk of Anantnag town in south Kashmir, challenging the authority of his excellency, the Governor of J&K. The governor had appealed to all slaughterhouses in the valley not to slaughter sheep on this auspicious day. This was an indication that communal frenzy was gaining momentum to establish



the unity of the majority community against the minorities of the valley to play some big role in the state's socio-political system. However, this process resulted in the formation of a strong Islamic political outfit known as the Muslim United Front (MUF) in the early months of 1987.

The state assembly election took place in the middle of 1987, and all the major political parties, including the MUF, participated well in advance. The election was allegedly rigged by the National Conference headed by Dr Abdullah. The MUF was defeated, and Dr Abdullah's party, National Conference, won the election and took the reins of the state administration. The MUF now came openly with the voice of dissent against the regimes both at the centre and in the state, thus sowing the seeds of separatism in the valley.

In 1986 there was a big communal flare-up in villages, namely Dhanav, Bugom, Khudwani and Vanpoh villages in south Kashmir and Sopore in North Kashmir. The houses were burnt, and temples were desecrated by the majority community, and the Hindus of these areas were at the receiving end. The regime of Ghulam Mohammad Shah, the Chief Minister at that time, failed to prevail upon the majority community in South Kashmir to stop this hooliganism. Pandit Vaishnavi led a demonstration in Jammu in Feb 1986, where he had a narrow escape as the demonstration was lathi-charged.

While narrating the woes of 1986 communal trouble in Kashmir, Pandit Vaishnavi said, "The Hindu youth associated with the Vivekananda Society, which was a well-organized and dedicated group, was very much active in watching the interests of Kashmir and the country as a whole. He said that this group was trained to make area-wise rounds in every street and locality in villages, towns and cities to watch the movements of the doubtful elements so that a proper vigil was kept on anti-national activities. This had become necessary after the 1965 war with Pakistan when the Vivekananda Society had gathered information that Pakistan was very active in destabilizing Kashmir."

Utpal Koul, a prominent activist from this group, had noticed the movements of some youngsters everywhere in Kashmir as early as 1968. These youngsters



were from the fundamentalist groups working towards destabilising society. A secret plan to prepare a list of youth from the majority community in Kashmir for an armed struggle against India was unearthed by these youngsters.

Vaishnavi ji said that Pandit Triloki Nath Dhar, the founder President of Bhartiya Jan Sangh in Kashmir, raised his voice against this hidden agenda of the anti-national elements in Kashmir in a press conference after which he was arrested and was later released. Shri Balraj Madhok, the President of Bhartiya Jan Sangh BJS, raised his voice in New Delhi against then Chief Minister Shri Gulam Mohammad Sadiq holding him responsible for an increase in the anti-national activities in the state. Bhartiya Jan Sangh raised this issue in parliament, but no notice was taken of such an alarming situation. This callousness on the part of the authorities led to the formation of a student organization in Kashmir which continued to preach direct action with arms against Indian forces in Kashmir. Vaishnavi ji said that the fact was that the Government of India was well informed by its intelligence agencies about the start of the process of radicalization of Kashmir since 1970.

In 1985 the Kashmir-centric RSS leadership organized protest rallies against the rising voices of anti-Indian forces in Kashmir under the banner of the Hindu Yuva forum. While leading the rally on this occasion, Shri Shiban Krishan Pandita and Shri Utpal Koul made it clear in their speeches that the rally was meant to serve as a wake-up call to the authorities in power so that timely action could be taken to save Kashmir. The Kashmiri Pandit leadership involving itself actively in gauging the tone and tenor of the activism shown by the Pro Azadi and Pro Pakistani elements in Kashmir from time to time kept a close watch on what had happened in Vanpoh, Khudwani, Danav, Bugone in South Kashmir and Sopore in North Kashmir during the communal outrage that had taken place in early 1986. This created havoc in these areas inhabited mainly by Kashmiri Pandits. The leadership of the Kashmiri Pandit Community who deliberated in Srinagar on the issue of loot, arson and destruction of Hindu places of worship in the early months of 1986 were the RSS stalwarts of Kashmir, namely Pandit Prem Nath Bhat, Pandit Harji Lal



Jad, Pandit Amar Nath Ganjoo, Pandit Madan Lal Khashu, Pandit Pushkar Nath Karnal, Pandit Pushkar Nath Zadoo, Pandit Som Nath Ogra, Pandit Durga Prashad Koul, Pandit Moti Lal Malla, Pandit Hira Lal Chatta, Pandit Soom Nath Suri, Pandit Makhan Lal Aima and Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi who joined them from Jammu. Others who joined these deliberations were Pandit Hriday Nath Jattu, Brigadier Madan President All India Kashmiri Samaj, Dr Gopi Krishan Mujoo, Pandit C.L.Sadhu, Pandit Bansi Lal Khar, Pandit Dwarika Nath Munshi and Pandit Sarvesh Kak. They again met in Jammu in May 1986. The meeting ended with a note that the events in Kashmir indicated that the growing fundamentalism in Kashmir had some bigger plan: to terrorise the minorities in Jammu and Kashmir. This was true when Pakistani President General Zia-ul-Haq devised a hidden plan to destroy Kashmir. The mission plan was called "TOPAC", which came to the surface in the year 1988. The plan aimed at annexing Kashmir from India. The operation "TOPAC" was to be implemented in three phases: the first one was creating a communal divide, the second was involving Muslim youth with arms and ammunition, and the third was sending PAK Guerrillas to Kashmir.

#### Anantnag Communal Violence of 1986 – Meeting the Prime Minister & the President

Coming back to the communal riots of 1986 and its aftermath, the report of the meeting of all the Kashmiri Pandit leaders was ultimately sent to the Arya Samaj and RSS leadership in New Delhi on demand. It was decided by the central leadership of these two organisations that a delegation of Kashmiri Hindus under the leadership of Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi should meet the various political organisations and also the President of India and Prime Minister of India in New Delhi to apprise them about ground realities of Kashmir. It was as early as June 1986 that the said delegation met all the concerned parties and the leaders in New Delhi and tried to bring them around

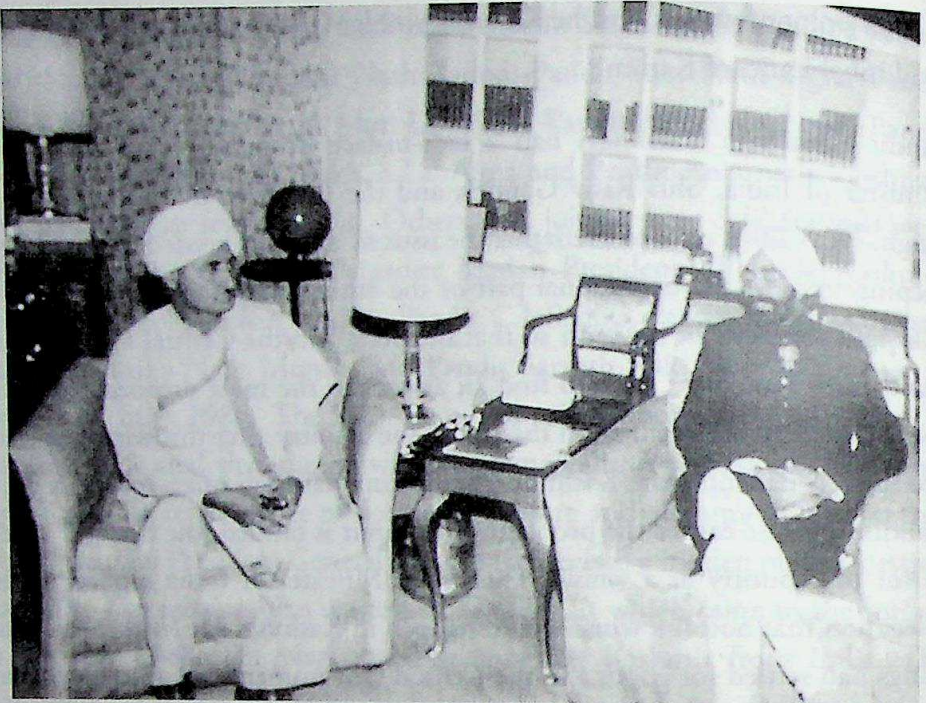


to their point of view about the Kashmir problem they had gathered, being the local inhabitants of Kashmir.

Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi had a face-to-face encounter with the Prime Minister of India, Shri Rajiv Gandhi, and the President of India, Shri Zail Singh. He made it clear to them that the issue of Kashmir needed to be studied, keeping in view the operational part of the ethnic cleansing plan of the Pro Pakistani elements in Kashmir so that the State and the Central Government could take immediate steps to find an answer to the most dreaded plan that could take away Kashmir from the rest of the country after throwing away the Pro Indian elements from Kashmir. Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi told Shri Rajiv Gandhi that the earlier the problem in Kashmir is tackled, the better it could be for the country as a whole. The Prime Minister of India replied to the delegation that nothing worst would happen in Kashmir. He further said that things had settled for good, and the Central Government had a keen eye over the activities of the separatists in the Kashmir valley. He said that there was no such plan in sight so far as Pakistan's involvement in Kashmir was concerned.

The delegation returned to Jammu, and Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi and Shri Hira Lal Chatta, accompanied by Ram Gopal Shawl Wale of Arya Samaj, who was also a member of the delegation, addressed a press conference in Jammu and said, "Alas! New Delhi has never been able to believe those from Jammu and Kashmir whose voice is patriotic."





With President Gyani Zail Singh post 1986 riots

### Attacks on Janmashtami Procession & Somyar Temple

The Kashmiri Pandit community now became wiser to ponder the happenings in Kashmir. The series of events ever since 1980 onwards alarmed the community to make them take action to prepare themselves for safety and security in the coming years. However, the Government of India and the State Government never supported their viewpoint, and the community ultimately had to suffer.

Pandit Vaishnavi was elected as the President of All State Kashmiri Pandit Conference Sanatan Dharma Yuvak Sabha (ASKPC), Sheetal Nath Srinagar, in April 1987, after he completed his term as Pracharak of Vishva Hindu Parishad in Jammu in November 1986. The event in which he was elected as the president was attended by delegates from North Kashmir and South Kashmir. Delegates came from Kupwara, Handwara, Sogam, Kokarnag, Anantnag, Verinag and various other places of Kashmir to be a part of this



election, and Pandit Amarnath was unanimously elected as the President. ASKPC was established in Kashmir in 1931. Pandit Vaishnavi's task became quite difficult because he had to run his organization in Kashmir when Kashmir was passing through difficult times. The period started with bomb and grenade attacks, and anti-national elements unleashed the terror.

In Srinagar, a procession used to be taken out on Janmashtami every year. In 1987, the government displayed resistance towards it as the militancy had started showing its face. However, Vaishnavi Ji did not agree to this and a procession was successfully taken out. Stones were pelted during the procession, which led to the death of one youth named Ashok Ganju. ASKPC had to struggle to get his murderer arrested, and they succeeded in doing so. On the tenth day after his death, an attempt was made to burn the Somyar temple at Habba Kadal, as a result of which the temple suffered some damage. On hearing this news, Vaishnavi Ji reached the spot. A crowd was already there, and they started demanding action. Pandit Amarnath and Shri Tikalal Taploo picked up the rugs from the temple and laid them on Habba Kadal. They sat down there to protest with Shri Hriday Nath Jattoo and Shri Pran Nath Takoo. After a few hours, the DIG police met them and promised to take action. Then they went to Shri Takoo's residence and made further plans. They planned that five to six youths would sit on a hunger strike for eight hours in Sheetal Nath every day. They disclosed this plan to the Pandit population in the evening at Somyar temple. While their meeting was on, some miscreants started pelting stones at them. They did not protest for about one hour but afterwards, Vaishnavi Ji sent about six to seven boys, and the miscreants ran away. The next day a stage was set up at Sheetal Nath. Four people, including Vaishnavi Ji and Shri Kashi Nath Dullu, who was a member of Yuvak Sabha for a long time and Hridaynath Jattu, sat for the hunger strike till six in the evening. They broke their fast by drinking a glass of water. Many people used to sit in front of the stage and recite Mantras. The next day the government sent two police officers, Shri S P Ganjoo and Shri Rattan Lal Taploo, to talk to them. The fast, however, continued. On the third day, they came again to



say that the government wanted to speak to them, provided that they ended the fast. They did not give up fasting, and it was decided that on the fourth day, talks would begin without giving up fasting. They reached the government guest house. The members who attended on behalf of the government were Shri Pyarelal Handoo, Divisional Commissioner and the Director General, Police. From the community side, there were three of them, Vaishnavi Ji, Shri Pran Nath Taku and Shri Hriday Nath Jattoo. They brought tea and requested them to break the fast. They, however, responded on a lighter side that DGP and the minister were Pandits, so they should also not drink the tea. On hearing this, the tea was taken away. The demands that they placed were that the government repair the temple and the culprits caught and punished, and care be taken that such incidents did not occur again. The next day they again had a meeting with the government representatives. The government agreed to repair the temple and clarified that security would be provided to the temples. However, they insisted that the assurance should come directly from the chief minister. The government officials agreed, and it was decided that the action committee members would go to Jammu to meet the chief minister. The government arranged transportation and their stay. However, they paid back to the government whatever expenses they had incurred on their travel and stayed in Jammu. Six people went to Jammu, and they were Shri Hriday Nath Jattu, Shri Pran Nath Taku, Shri Bal Krishan Handoo, Shri Kashi Nath Dullu and Vaishnavi Ji. The next day they met the chief minister, Shri Mohammad Shafi Pandit, and two revenue secretaries. Their demands were accepted. The Srinagar development authority approved a sum of eight lac rupees, whereas about five lacs were finally disbursed, and the temple was repaired. Shri Somnath Bhat, who was the General Secretary of the temple trust, worked hard to get the temple reconstructed by associating himself with the temple reconstruction work.

### Mass Exodus of Kashmiri Pandits in 1990

The exodus brought about uncertain and frightful days when nobody knew their future, and everyone feared their security. In the hours of gloom and



darkness, everyone was shocked in the midst of a rough and turbulent atmosphere. Jammu was the first destination for those who were the victims of the perpetrators of destruction and terror in Kashmir. These forces had mobilized the people of one religion against the nationalist spirit. This was an indication that all was not going to be well for the country in the near future.

The lukewarm approach by the government to the security concerns of J&K state during the past few decades and some other political factors were responsible for the terror that was unleashed. Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, in his address to the members of a committee of the National Human Rights Commission in New Delhi in 1992, said, "The events emerging immediately after 1986 riots in Kashmir proved beyond any doubt that the exercise widespread in the nook and corner of the valley had been taken up by the political dispensation of the valley in a manner primarily to generate violence and hatred against the nation. The heat was generated to create heaps of extreme explosives that kept mounting since 1986 & 1987 when the Muslim United Front was defeated in the assembly elections allegedly rigged by Dr. Farooq Abdullah's National Conference. The defeated MUF candidates were thus at the forefront of receiving training in the terrorist camps in POK.

### Assassination of Tikalal Taploo and Other Selective Killings

The year 1989 was the year when the entire valley was put on fire by the militants trained in Pakistan. Shri Pyare Lal Koul, in his book "Crises in Kashmir", has remarked that for the last many years, posters were pasted in many parts of the valley admonishing Hindus to flee or be ready to face the consequences. No serious thought was given to such serious prejudicial activities of the anti-India and anti-Hindu lobbies working in Kashmir. From early 1989 the militants enforced their commands by declaring a civil curfew, and business came to a halt. Video shops, bars, cinema halls and liquor shops were ordered to be closed by the militants, and the orders were enforced strictly. The Government did not take any notice of this entire parallel



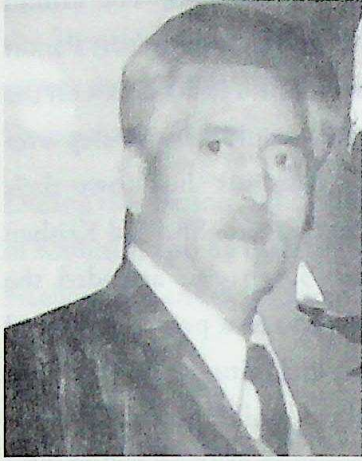
Government run by the militants. This all was done in the name of creating a society based on Nizame Mustafa.

Shri Som Nath Pandit, in his book 'Kashmir Hindu Heritage - a Study' states that the selective killings started from early 1989 when Pandit Keshav Nath, a priest of the Vichar Nag temple who lived like a hermit in the temple was shot in the head by his security guard Mohammad Yousuf, a police constable, who insisted that he (Pandit Keshav Nath) convert to Islam. The chowkidar of the temple assisted the constable in committing the crime by switching off the power from the main switchboard, thereby enabling the assassin to flee in darkness.

In September 1989, Shri Mohd. Yousuf Halwai of the National Conference and veteran BJP leader Shri Tika Lal Taploo were killed by the militants. The killing spree continued with the killing of Shri Nilkanth Ganju, Ex-Session Judge, Abdul Satar Ranjur, CPI leader and Shri Prem Nath Bhat, a leading advocate and social activist of the state, Molana Masoodi, a great social and political figure of the state and Shri Navin Saproo in the following months. In the year 1990, Shri Ashok Qazi, Shri Bal Krishan Ganju and Shri K.L. Ganjoo of Baramulla were also killed. Smt. Prana Ganjoo was kidnapped after her husband, Shri K.L. Ganjoo, was killed. Shri Chaman Lal Koul from Chattabal Srinagar was torn into pieces. Smt. Girja Raina of Bandipora was kidnapped on her way to the school where she was teaching. She was first molested and then put through a Band Saw machine, where she was horizontally cut into two pieces. The genocide continued unabated in the years to come.

It was in late 1988, when the selective killings of minority communities by terrorists had started, that Pandit Vaishnavi, Dr. Susheel Wattal and Mr. Pushkarnath Karneil met Mirwaiz Maulvi Farooq at his residence, Mirwaiz Manzil and had an open discussion with him regarding the fate of the minority community in Kashmir. Mr. Farooq's response was positive towards Pandits. The trio, however, left the Mirwaiz Manzil anxious about the future.





Shri Tikalal Taploo

On September 14, 1989, at 11 AM, Shri Tikalal Taploo, the tallest leader and the state Vice President of the Jammu & Kashmir Bhartiya Janata Party, was assassinated. He was with Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi the previous night in Habba Kadal till 11 PM. He had walked with Pandit Vaishnavi to escort him till Kanyakadal as Vaishnavi was on the way to his home in Chattabal. Tikalal was concerned about Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi's safety. In the morning, when Amarnath Vaishnavi learned about his death, he went to his house.

Many people had gathered from Srinagar and some nearby villages.



Last journey of Shri Tikalal Taploo

There were all kinds of people, mostly Hindus and some Muslims, rich and poor, cobblers, cleaners and taxi drivers. ASKPC arranged for his dead body to be kept for last tributes at Sheetal Nath. Later thousands of people joined the procession towards the crematorium. Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi delivered speeches which were full of anger towards the people who had killed Tikalal Taploo. Hindu youth was also irate. While the procession moved peacefully,



at some places, Muslim youth pelted stones at the procession. The Hindu youth were very emotional and angry and about to retaliate; however, Pandit Vaishnavi requested the Hindu youth to exercise restraint. He lay down on the road and told them that if they had to retaliate, they would have to step over his body. Looking at the anger in the procession, Muslims shut down their shops. The procession peacefully reached the cremation site. Shri Lal Krishan Advani, Shri Kedarnath Sahani and Shri Baldev Singh also attended the funeral. On the tenth day of his death, ASKPC organized a prayer at Sheetal Nath, and people from all walks of life attended it, including politicians from various parties. While Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi was walking along with the procession towards the crematorium, senior superintendent of police Shri Alahbaksh advised him to accept security guards for his security, which the government would provide him. Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi was, however, not interested in the security. The police officials were worried about his safety. He was also informed to be cautious several times as he used to commute on his bicycle.



Shri Tikalal Taploo's killing was the greatest setback to Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi. In his speech on the tenth Day after Shri Taploo's death, he said that Shri Tikalal was a leader of high calibre and a daring fighter who was always available at beck and call for the task of safeguarding the national



interest. He, however, warned militants while paying tribute to Shri Tikalal on the historical ground of Sheetal Nath at a public function. He stated in clear terms that militants had killed Arjun (a reference to Shri Tikalal), but Dronacharya (a reference to self) was still alive to fight back the atrocities.

During this period, many bombs exploded from time to time at several places in Kashmir, and he used to visit the site every time. During the same time, Shri Neelkanth Ganjoo, a retired sessions judge, was also killed at noon in front of the police.



## Chapter — 6

### Gandhian Secular Kashmir Exposed—The Holocaust

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It cannot be ruled out that with the success of Pakistani blood-spitting operations in Punjab, the local anti-India forces joined hands with Pakistan and started a ruthless anti-India campaign. The aggressiveness of militants, as already explained, went on increasing. The policies of Dr Farooq Abdullah, Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir between 1987 and 1989, gave a boost to corruption in the administration. The people, in general, were disgruntled with the government. The militants, in league with the Muslim United Front, also stepped up their anti-India activities and hundreds of bombs were hurled at local police, post offices and banks. The then Deputy Inspector General of Police, Shri Watali, was attacked at his residence and terrorist Aijaz Dar was subsequently killed in the encounter. Fantastic stories were cooked to hoodwink the premature exposure of the designs of militancy. The militants got a further boost with the change of government at the centre in November 1989. Rubaiya Sayed, the daughter of the then Home Minister of India, Mufti Mohammad Sayed, was kidnapped. Her release was obtained in exchange for five top hardcore militants, including JKLF Deputy Commander Hamid Sheikh, who was earlier arrested during an encounter with the police. The released militants walked through Srinagar as part of a large procession. The state administration remained quiet as it wanted to embarrass the national front central government, which had VP Singh as the Prime Minister of the country. The militants sent a word to the people in the valley that freedom of Kashmir was around the corner and the government was about to fall. A mass upsurge led all the governmental activities to halt, and the subversives



appointed their agents in all offices to ensure that the officers in the offices abide by their dictates. Official funds from the public health engineering department, public works department and irrigation department were diverted to fund secessionist activities. Truckloads of medicines from government hospitals were shifted to underground hospitals run by the militants. The nationalist forces in the state were astonished at the inertia and apathy on the part of the state's government and the centre. The condition deteriorated under the Farooq Abdullah government. When Shri Tikalal Taploo was assassinated on 14th September 1989, the chief minister, in reply to a citizen's query, said, "Abhi Kya Hua, Abhi Punjab to Nahi Hua!" (What untoward has happened till date, does it match with Punjab situation). An open deal was given to the separatists for killing patriots and for running a parallel Government, alerting the minorities as they were being killed day in and day out. The silence and the let loose policy of the government made them flee from the soil of Kashmir. The so-called secular leaders and the secular parties in the country remained tight-lipped about events in Kashmir.

Taking a look at all these events, Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi would generally express that it was not that his memory could have fallen so short that he could not have traced the pages of the history of Kashmir more so for the periods from 14th century AD to 17th century AD. However, the rich cultural heritage of the entire state of Jammu & Kashmir, particularly the Kashmir Shaivism and the Kashmir Sufi-ism, had swayed his thinking to such an extent that he always felt that Kashmir was a mosaic of religious and social identities known not only for its inclusive social and cultural life but also its shared religious spaces.

There have been periods of confrontations in the history of Jammu & Kashmir depending on the path chosen by various segments of society. Bitter confrontation in the recent past, started by Muslims under the banner of the Muslim Conference in the year 1931, was named as "Quit Kashmir Movement". The movement was launched against the monarchy, and the monarch at that time was Maharaja Hari Singh. The movement became



communal, resulting in looting and killings of the minorities in the Kashmir Valley. Periods of war and peace, stability and turmoil and hope and despair had come and gone in the history of the state.

Now the trend of ethnic cleansing, which was the worst of all such events starting from 1989 onwards, could be considered something very alarming for the years that followed. The terrorism, which showed its ugly teeth in Kashmir, spread its tentacles to the rest of the country and had its impact on the mindset of an average Indian as he could not have swallowed the bitter pill of witnessing his countrymen turning refugees in their own country that is Bharat. One could easily say that the seeds of terrorism in India were sown in Kashmir through the events that followed in the decade of 1990 and then in the years that followed.

The names of a few people who were brutally killed are listed below:

Shri. Lasa Kaul, the then Director Doordarshan Srinagar, was gunned down on February 13, 1990.

Mrs. Sarla Bhat, a nurse at Soura Medical Institute, was gang-raped on April 14, 1990, and subsequently murdered. Her dead body was seen lying on the roadside in Lal Bazar.

Shri Kapoor, owner of Vikas bakery in Chota Bazar, Srinagar, was gunned down at his shop on March 19, 1990.

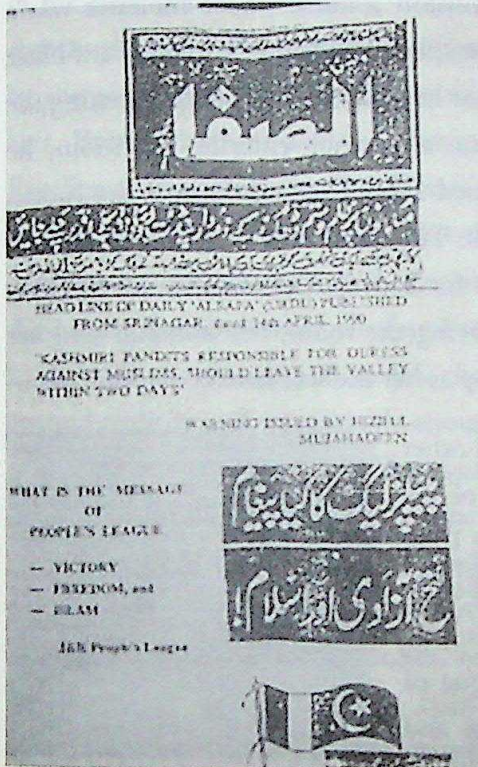
Shri Triloki Nath Bhat, the petition writer of Srinagar, was kidnapped, and his dead body was found on June 12, 1990, with wounds on his body.

Shri PN Handoo, Assistant Director, Information, was gunned down on March 1, 1990, outside his house at Balgarden, Srinagar.

Shri T N Razdan, a dedicated I.B. officer, was shot dead on February 12, 1990, at Maisuma Srinagar.



Shri B.K. Ganju was killed in his home in Chota Bazar in February 1990.



Warning from terrorists in local newspaper

Shri Jiyalal Kaw of Handwara was kidnapped along with his minor son on May 18, 1990, and their dead bodies were found with multiple injuries on July 25, 1990.

Shri Chamanlal Kaul and two other young boys were killed in their houses at Chattabal in Srinagar.

Shri Shiban Lal Kalloo, a brave and daring police officer who dealt with the militancy with a heavy hand in Baramulla district, was dragged out of his home at Bagi-Mehtab, Srinagar and two rounds of fire were pumped into his body. His eldest son Sunil was inside the house while his father was shot outside. Militants tried to

strangulate him with a wire and later put a curtain cloth in his mouth. However, he escaped.

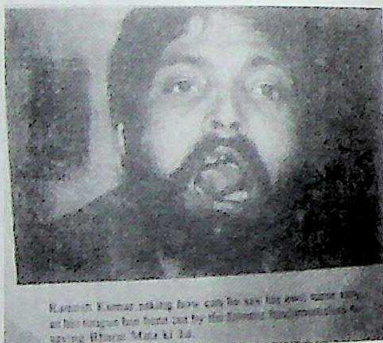
Retired scholar and teacher Shri D N Muju was murdered on the night of July 6 1990.

Shri Tarif Naaz, a Kashmiri writer, in the introduction of his novel, "Mayhem in Paradise", published in 2014, writes, "The background of the novel is real though all the characters in it are fictitious. I attempted to capture the true atmosphere that prevailed during the armed struggle in Kashmir, which caused an unprecedented blood bath. I hope this novel will entertain you besides flashing you back to the past."



In chapter fifth of the novel, he gives a heart rendering incident of rape of a Kashmiri Pandit girl, who was by profession a nurse whose molester was a Kashmiri militant. The incident had taken place inside the hospital. Tarif Naaz says that the militant knocked at her door in SMHS hospital. On opening the door, the nurse saw a man with a gun, and while entering the room, he introduced himself as a mujahid. He used filthy language against the Indian army and all those who supported India. The nurse was terrified and resisted his forceful and terrorizing commands for a while. Ultimately the mujahid satisfied his carnal desire, and while leaving the room, the mujahid told her that she should stop crying and be happy as her life was saved.

There are many such cases of rapes and other tortures meted out to the womenfolk of the minority community in Kashmir during 1990-91. Many such cases have not been officially revealed to date. The more barbaric acts were witnessed, like the cutting of the tongue of Shri Ramesh Kumar, the kidnapping and killing of a great Kashmiri poet Sarvanand Kaul Premi and his son by his students in



Ramesh Kumar's tongue was cut

broad daylight on the road in his village, Sof Shali Bag in south Kashmir. Shri Brij Nath Kaul's killing was no less than a barbaric act. He was kidnapped from his house in Heevan, Shopian, along with his wife, Mrs. Sumitra Kaul. Shri Kaul's legs were tied with one end of the rope, and the other end was tied to the jeep in which the militants were travelling. Shri Kaul died while he was being dragged by the jeep. His wife was shot dead after being molested. The barbarism was at its height when Shri V S Tiwari from Madhya Pradesh, Shri Tapoo and Shri P. Shekhar, both from Bihar, young probationary officers of LIC of India, were abducted from Nishat Garden. Shri Tiwari and Shri Tapoo were roasted alive. Shri P. Shekhar was taken to some unknown place and killed there.



This mayhem included cross-firing, crackdown and search operations resulting in the harassment and killing of the peace-loving citizens of the valley. The continuance of strike calls by the separatists and the imposition of the curfew by the government put the day to day living of the people in the valley to a halt. Bomb blasts in Jammu province in Doda district did not stop. His Excellency, the governor of J & K state Shri Jagmohan had to deliver on various fronts. He had to ensure the smooth running of the government and the government offices, banks and educational institutions. He also had to ensure the proper distribution of relief and proper rehabilitation of all those affected by the militancy inside and outside the valley. Governor was fully aware of the ground realities and was capable enough to restore normalcy. His efforts were going in the right direction. The confidence-building measures taken by the government started yielding results. The unfortunate part was that the government of India seemed to be caught between the devil and the deep sea. Minister for Kashmir affairs Shri George Fernandes and some of his cabinet colleagues, socialists, communists, secular parliamentarians, including the parliamentarians from the J&K state and human rights activists, who were against the use of force by the state, started a disinformation campaign against the governor. It seemed that they had indirectly joined the earlier disinformation campaign by Ms. Benazir Bhutto, the Prime Minister of Pakistan. This disinformation campaign ultimately resulted in removing Shri Jagmohan as governor. He was replaced by Mr. Girish Chandra Saxena, and the hopes for restoring normalcy were shattered. By then, the Kashmiri Pandit leadership had made some headway in solving the problems of the people in distress. However, they had to make fresh efforts with the changed political masters, which ultimately resulted in delaying the solutions to the problems beforehand.

Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, while having a keen eye on the situation emerging from 1989 onwards, opined that in 1947 when Pakistani raiders attacked Kashmir, some collective and conscious efforts were made by the elders irrespective of their religious affinities to maintain peace and brotherhood. But



now, a drastic change in the mindset of the elders, particularly of the clerics, was visible. It seemed that civility in Kashmir had rendered itself helpless in the presence of the planning of the militants, and the policy was that minorities be terrorized and then driven out. He said that it was Mr. Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, the tallest leader of that time, who came to the forefront to rescue the minorities of Kashmir and drive the Pakistani raiders out of Kashmir. Sheikh Abdullah had earlier disbanded the Muslim conference to establish a new political outfit called the National Conference in 1938. Pandit Vaishnavi said that National Conference came into existence only after a Kashmir Pandit leader Mr. Prem Nath Bazaz, who off late became a sympathizer of Pro Pakistan elements, brainwashed Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah to come out of the Muslim Conference and form a secular party by the name "National Conference". The prominent Kashmiri Pandit leaders who took membership of the National Conference party immediately after it was formed were Pandit Prem Nath Bazaz, Pandit Kashyap Bandu, Pandit Jialal Kilam, Dr Shamboo Nath Peshin and Pandit Sham Lal Saraf.

Ever since 1986, Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, while meeting people who were at the helm of affairs in Delhi and also through his speeches and press conferences, had been drawing the attention of the authorities and warning them of the coming events but to no avail. The holier-than-thou attitude of the government in understanding and tackling the militancy and their non-interference in putting off the flames of communalism put Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi into utter gloom. He would say that it appeared that the government was acting with a communal bias and keeping itself away from tackling the daily killings and the bomb blasts abetted by Pakistan. It made him restless. As a keen observer of what was going around him, he would say that despite General Zaki's confidence in maintaining strict vigil on the borders, being in charge of the command, the militants were pouring in intermittently in hundreds from Pak-occupied Kashmir. As a devout patriot, he questioned the ability and the sincerity of the General not once but several times. He was also forthright in expressing that as early as in the mid-eighties, he had gone



through the columns of one of the national newspapers while it was stated that there was a secret meeting between the two prime ministers of India and Pakistan namely Shri Rajiv Gandhi and Ms. Benazir Bhutto respectively in Muri, which is in Pakistan. According to Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, the news had, later on, disappeared from all the concerned quarters as if nothing like that had ever happened. In several news conferences, he demanded from the government that the aims and objectives of the said talks be made public. But there was utter silence from the government and a total blackout of the sensational news. Thus, he made his point of view public when he said that such a secret meeting between the prime ministers of the two countries and maintaining complete silence on the issue by the government could mean that it could have been a sellout deed from the Indian side. He would therefore say that the said sell-out could have emboldened Pakistan to unleash terror in Kashmir. Thus, the events emerging in Kashmir in the 1990s further legitimized his earlier comment that Gandhi Ji's secular Kashmir was nowhere in sight. He said that he had lost all hopes of the survival of the minorities and peace lovers from the different communities in Kashmir. The events like the burning of houses and religious places of the minorities in the valley during this decade had become the headlines in the daily newspapers, thus sending shock waves to all the genuine secularists in the country.

The only forceful organization of the Kashmiri Pandits in the Valley, known by the name of "All State Kashmiri Pandit Conference Sanatan Dharam Yuvak Sabha (ASKPC)", with its headquarters at Sheetal Nath in Srinagar, was closely watching these developments and had shown its statesmanship under its president Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi. The organization mobilized the Kashmiri Pandit society to fight against this grave situation. In November and December of 1989, its members made a tour of the entire valley and collected first-hand militancy-related information. The touring of its leaders had serious implications for their security and the security of their families. In this connection, it will be relevant to give first-hand information about the security concerns of Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi. On December 29, 1989, only a few



days after Shri Prem Nath Bhatt's killing by the militants, Dr Agnishekhar, presently Panun Kashmir leader, visited Pandit Vaishnavi's house in the early hours of the morning at Chattabal in Srinagar. He communicated to his family members that he had come to know from some reliable sources that an attempt was already made on the life of Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi by the militants, which had fallen flat, and a new plot was being framed to take his life. Agnishekhar, therefore, purchased a cap for Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, replacing his turban so that he was not identified easily. He also requested that he leave the valley. Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, with his usual poise and calmness and a smile on his face, attended to his organizational work till ASKPC finally decided to leave Kashmir with a mission to save the entire state and to reach Delhi for the same purpose after some deliberations with their peers at Jammu. Unfortunately, it appeared that Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi's faith in secularism, the way it was nourished and followed by the so-called secularists, was shattered.

Amarnath Vaishnavi had studied various scriptures, commentaries, and books of reputed authors, including Dr Radhakrishnan and Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. He was convinced that Hinduism could only be seen as a way of life and not as a practicing religion of any particular faith. To him, Bhartiyata (Indianness) could be synonymous with it. He had a similarity of thought with those who believed that the early Muslim invaders named the people living on the banks of the Sindhu River Hindus and the westerners who came to Hindustan and continued to rule this country for about two hundred years changed the name of HIND into IND. The word INDIA was thus coined. He often quoted a verse from Savarkar's book, "Hindutva", saying, "Sindh Sindhu Parianta, Yese, Bharat Bhoomika Pitra Bhu Punya Bhu Chaiv Savie Bharati Smriti." This means that the land bounded by the river Sindhu in the north and the Indian Ocean in the south by whomsoever is owned as the ancestral and the holy land, he can call himself a Bharatiya (Indian). Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi would also say, "The word Hindu does not find its place in Vedas



and Puranas as these are prehistoric. Therefore, I am a Sanatani by faith, and Hinduism symbolizes my nationhood.”

Thus, he would make sure that all faiths are treated equally everywhere. He was dismayed at seeing his people getting uprooted. However, he was not disheartened. It is true that as a leader, he was worried about those of his fellow men also, who were yet in the valley at the receiving end. He and his team were on tenterhooks to attain stability out of chaos. After being disappointed by the mishandling of the affairs of the state by the state government, ASKPC decided to meet the prime minister of India and the leaders of other political parties to apprise them about the state affairs and to find out a way to save the people of Kashmir particularly its minorities from the genocide.

#### Kashmir Boiling: Negotiations to Appoint Mr. Jagmohan as the Governor

The delegation, under the leadership of Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, left Kashmir for Delhi on January 4th, 1990, after consulting the leaders of other sister organizations, including Pandit Hridaynath Jattu. Pandit Jattu had promised them that he would meet them in Jammu up to January 9, 1990. Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi and his associates waited for him till the said date so that he, too, could be part of the delegation that they had proposed. However, Pandit Hridaynath Jattu could not make it to Jammu until March 1990. The delegation left Jammu for Delhi on January 10, 1990. On January 11, the delegation was accompanied by Shri L.K. Advani to the Prime Minister of India, Shri V P Singh and the Deputy Prime Minister Shri Devi Lal and other cabinet ministers except for the then Home Minister Shri Mufti Mohammad Sayed, who was unavailable.

Immediately after the assassination of Shri Tikalal Taploo, the executive body of All State Kashmiri Pandit Conference, Sanatan Dharam Yuvak Sabha, under the presidentship of Shri Vaishnavi held a series of meetings to ponder over the violent situation in Kashmir. It was decided that they would set out on a secret fact-finding mission and travel across the length and breadth of the valley to



unearth the plan of the Jihadis and the separatists. Subsequently, they documented their findings in what was named the "Document of facts", in December 1989. This document made it clear that a civil war was imminent in the valley and the arms and ammunition as well as its handlers had already entered the valley due to the let loose policy at the borders of J&K by then General Officer Commanding, General Zaki and the malafide intentions of then state government.

A delegation under the leadership of Pandit Vaishnavi left for New Delhi to present the "Document of facts" to the central government to apprise them of the developments that could lead to the cession of Kashmir, endangering the sovereignty of the entire nation. This apprehension later turned into reality on the night of 19th January 1990 when the separatists marched on the streets of the Kashmir Valley and made overt announcements on loudspeakers from the mosques, revealing their real intentions of separating Kashmir from the rest of India.

These leaders from Kashmir and Shri L.K. Advani apprised the government about the latest militancy-related situation in Kashmir and requested for immediate action in the troubled state. Prime Minister sought the delegation's opinion on the issue of taking concrete action so that Kashmir could come out of the menace of militancy. Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi suggested that Shri Jagmohan be brought back as the governor of the state because he witnessed the incidents in the early period of the decade of 1980s, being the governor of the state during that period. He was, therefore, well-versed with the situation of Kashmir to a great extent. The prime minister did not make any commitment. He, however, promised Shri Advani and all those present in the delegation that he would see them again on the 13th of January 1990 after he would talk to his cabinet colleagues on the issue. On the 13th of January, Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi and his colleagues met the Prime Minister as per the program, and in this meeting, the Prime Minister communicated to Pandit Amarnath and his team the opinion of the cabinet concerning the said proposal. The prime minister sought the delegation's cooperation to convince



Shri Jagmohan to accept his posting as the governor of the state for the second term. Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi had also found out information from reliable sources that Mufti Sayed alone had vehemently opposed the said proposal in the cabinet meeting. In contrast, Devilal had been all for Jagmohan's posting as the governor of the state at that very critical juncture. The fact remains that Shri. Jagmohan was busy during those days, writing his book, "My Frozen Turbulence in Kashmir". He was busy spending his days at the Library of India International Centre in New Delhi. So Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi straightaway went to India International Centre, New Delhi, where he met Shri Jagmohan. After deliberating with him on the said issue, he urged him to accept the offer in the country's larger interest. Shri Jagmohan finally accepted the offer. Before that, Shri Jagmohan asked for the reason as to why he, in particular, was being sent to the J&K state to run the administration in the troubled state. Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi replied that because of his involvement with Kashmir affairs and his understanding of the Kashmir problem in a proper perspective, Kashmiri Pandits wanted Kashmir to be administered by him to bring Kashmir back to normalcy. It was on the 15th of January 1990 that Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi met the Prime Minister of India personally and conveyed to him the necessary information in this regard. Shri Jagmohan finally received a call on the midnight of 18th January 1990 from the Prime Minister of India for being present in the crucial cabinet meeting that would take place at that moment. Shri Jagmohan attended the cabinet meeting, and after due deliberations, he received the cabinet order for reporting in the winter capital of J&K state as its governor. It was early in the morning of 19th January that Shri Jagmohan landed at Jammu airport and straightaway reached the governor's office and took charge as the Governor. It is pertinent to mention here that Shri Jagmohan had accepted the offer only on the condition that he should be given a free hand in dealing with the Kashmir situation. The government of India had accepted this condition. General K.V. Krishna Rao was replaced by Shri Jagmohan, and the state was under the governor's rule.



The Pakistani media exhorted people in the state to come out on the streets and defy the orders of the authorities, whatsoever they were. There were widespread protests by the pro-Jihadi elements in the valley. The night of 19th January 1990 turned out to be violent, and the army carried out search operations to look for arms. The whole valley resonated with the sound of the loudspeakers fitted on the roofs of the mosques. People were seen on the roads in large numbers throughout the valley. Hindus were also asked to join the so-called Jihad (Islamic war) and were forced to shout with all others, "We want Nizame Mustafa (Islamic rule)." Shri Ambardar, a Kashmiri Pandit and a resident of Tankipora, Srinagar, was forced to come out on the road to raise anti-India and pro-Pak slogans. He was killed in the crossfire between the police and the militants. Scores of anti-Indian demonstrators were killed in firing in Srinagar city, particularly in the Maisooma, Kaka Sarai and Safa Kadal areas. On the morning of 20th January, ALSAFA and other local newspapers issued threats to the senior government officials and the public working in banks not to attend the offices. They also appealed to people to close their accounts in the nationalized banks.

However, Jagmohan successfully maintained calm after the widespread violence during the night of 19th January. The local and national newspapers also highlighted the killings of that night out of proportion. The ISI of Pakistan panicked at seeing Jagmohan's success, and it intensified the killings of minorities in the state. Human rights tirade was raised against the so-called excesses of the security forces. The tirade was also raised by the local politicians and also by the central leaders like Shri Rajiv Gandhi, the then Congress President, Shri Chandrashekhar, Shri George Fernandez, Justice Tarkunday, Shri Balraj Puri from Jammu and the communists. Hindus in large numbers and other peace-loving people from different communities in Kashmir started leaving the valley out of fear.

The day after terror was unleashed in the valley on 19th January 1990, a big procession of Kashmiri Pandits, who had left the valley, proceeded to the U.N.O office at Gandhi Nagar in Jammu to handover a resolution, insisting



the UN to be witness to the holocaust in Kashmir due to Pak sponsored terrorism. The youth wing of the All-State Kashmiri Pandit Conference Sanatan Dharam Yuvak Sabha, Sheetal Nath, Srinagar, took the lead in organizing the procession with due patronage of its president Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi and Dr M. K. Teng, who was a leading thinker and scholar. Among others who led this procession were Shri Utpal Koul, Dr Agnishekhar, Dr Ajay Chrangoo, Shri Ashwani Chrangoo, Shri Shiban Krishan Pandita, Shri Rajinder Kampassi, Shri Balaji Seeru and Shri Chand Ji Bhat. The move was taken forward by this group when a delegation comprising DR. M.K. Teng, Shri Chaman Lal Gadu, who was the president of the Kashmiri Pandit Samiti Delhi, Shri Vijay Koul and Shri Utpal Koul, held a big demonstration in front of the UN Secretary-General, Butros Butros-Ghali, upon his arrival in New Delhi, for seeking UN Intervention to stop the brutalities committed in Kashmir.

### Delhi Calling: Highlighting Kashmir Situation in the Corridors of Power

New Delhi, the capital of India, witnessed a series of events in 1990 that enlightened the countrymen and the rest of the world about the Kashmir tragedy. An all-party meeting was held at Kashmir Bhawan on 4<sup>th</sup> March 1990. Shri Kedarnath Sahani of the BJP, Jathedar Rachpal Singh of the Akali Dal, Nawang Gorpe, the Buddhist representative and Bhim Singh of Panther's Party addressed the Kashmiri community members. All the speakers assured all possible help to the displaced community.

On 8<sup>th</sup> March 1990, a protest march started from Red Fort and ended at Boat Club. Thousands of men, women and children participated in this mass rally. The rally got converted into a public meeting at Boat Club and was addressed by Shri Krishan Lal Sharma, Shri Vijay Kumar Malhotra, Brigadier R.N. Madan, President All India Kashmiri Samaj, Shri C.L. Gadoo, President, Kashmiri Samiti, Delhi and leaders of the Akali Dal and Panther's Party.



Again, a purposeful meeting was held with U.S. Congressman Stephen J. Solarz, Chairman, House of Subcommittee on Asia and Pacific Affairs, on 31<sup>st</sup> May 1990 at New Delhi. The delegation comprised of Dr M.K. Teng, Dr K. Warikoo, Shri Utpal Koul and Shri Vijay Tikoo and the delegation was led by Shri C.L. Gadoo. On August 4, 1990, there was a big bomb blast outside a temple on Lawrence Road in New Delhi, resulting in the loss of lives.

On August 21<sup>st</sup> 1990, a massive rally was organized by Kashmiri Samiti, Delhi, to protest against the negligence of central and state governments towards the apathy of displaced persons from the valley. The rally was addressed at Boat Club by Shri L.K. Advani, Shri Madan Lal Khurana, both from BJP, Shri Saifuddin Chowdhary C.P.I (M), Shri C.L. Gadoo, Brigadier Madan and Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi.

In his address, Pandit Amarnath said, "India has so far been applying the policy of appeasement as a tool to settle its internal and external issues. This has to date, not yielded any result but has added to the country's problems on both fronts. Kashmir is one such issue for which we, the original inhabitants of the valley, are suffering for no fault of ours. The country has lost its territories to China and Pakistan simply because the Government adopted soft policies in dealing with them. The Political Opportunism that swayed over Political Rationalism during the last few years in our country on the National Level and also in the states created a vacuum in the administrative circles so far as policy planning matters were concerned. The coming together of different ideological groups for sharing power at the centre and also in the states like J&K State compelled the rulers to hold tight to their hearts the so-called liberals and the separatists, thereby benefiting both sides equally. This resulted in making compromises on the subjects directly or indirectly concerning National interests and even the interests of the state concerned."

He continued to say, "Tablighi groups from various parts of the country and also from outside the country started pouring into the valley of Kashmir during the last two decades with a mission to radicalize the majority community."



Those who were from inside the country dared to stay in Kashmir for years together only to deliver bitter speeches and daring to issue acrimonious advisories to the majority community in Kashmir to desist from advocating the thoughts of Rishis or, for that matter, Sufism which is purely Kashmir-centric and represents the heritage of ancient Kashmir. Most of these Tabligis were from Bihar and U.P. Their daily sermons brainwashed the community's youth, and as the faithful servants of their masters, the youth surrendered before them completely and adhered to the concept of purity as defined by these teachers and preachers. The purity concept led every youth to believe that whatever was Islamic was only to be accepted as a guiding principle so far as their Socio-Political and religious living was concerned. This led them to start a revolt against secular ideals, and efforts were afoot to create a theocratic Islamic state within J&K State. In this way, the youth raised the slogan of Jihad, which was supported by Pakistan. The Hindus were thus forced to leave the valley in 1989-1990. This was the 7<sup>th</sup> exodus of Kashmiri Hindus that had its beginning in 14<sup>th</sup> century AD."

He further added, "Radicalized Kashmir thus created such mayhem that the people of all faiths in Kashmir are being killed today. The Kashmiri Pandit leadership had been acquainting the leaders of the mainstream political parties, including the ruling party, with the nefarious designs of the separatists and also of the rising trend of the "Hate India Campaign in Kashmir". We had been going to New Delhi since 1973 to apprise the government about the demographic changes that were taking place in Kashmir. The government seemed to have adopted the policy of the 'Principle of Leisure for Remedy' so far as the problems of Kashmir are concerned. It was only once, and that too in March 1980, when I and Mr. Tikalal Taploo, a martyr who laid down his life in 1989, were heard with rapt attention by the youth congress leader Shri Sanjay Gandhi during our meeting with him. He suggested we revisit New Delhi in March 1981 to have a detailed discussion on Kashmir to pave the way for formulating a concrete policy on Kashmir. However, to our bad luck, Shri Sanjay Gandhi died in an air crash in June 1980, much earlier than our



scheduled meeting with him for March 1981. Now the question is who can be accountable for our tears as we have been rendered refugees in our own country.”

While concluding his speech, Pandit Vaishnavi appealed to the community members to face the exodus with courage and be a part of the movement that could lead them to their destination. He said, “Our continued struggle for survival will continue till we succeed in our mission.” Amarnath Vaishnavi had the guts to raise his voice for justice without any fear of its consequences, and whatever he said impacted those at the helm of affairs. Immediately after the rally was over, a memorandum was submitted to honourable Shri R. Venkataraman, President of India.

Many displaced families had reached Delhi direct from Kashmir. Kashmir Samiti, Delhi, took up the responsibility of their relief and rehabilitation. A transit camp started functioning at Kashmir Bhawan in Delhi for the displaced persons who were later shifted to other camps in Delhi. Kashmiri Samiti Delhi also started registration of the refugees at Kashmir Bhawan up to 30<sup>th</sup> September 1991, which was later taken over by the Delhi administration.

It is also informed that All India Kashmiri Samaj, New Delhi, was founded at Prayag Raj in 1979 under the leadership of Justice P.N. Bakshi as an umbrella organization of all other Kashmiri Pandit organizations. This organization also started taking pains to raise the problems of Kashmiri refugees at national and international levels. All India Kashmiri Samaj, under the presidentship of Shri Dwarakanath Munshi, announced in 1991 in the Jaipur conclave the formation of a Trust which would impart computer training to the displaced boys and girls. This program was implemented in Jammu by going directly to the refugee camps to impart such training. This was done by a group of renowned social activists, namely Shri Chamanlal Sadhu, Shri Bansilal Khar, Shri Makhanlal Aima, Justice Jankinath Bhat, Dr Gopikrishan Muju and Shri Sarveshar Kak.



### Formation of Sahayata Samiti - Providing Shelter to Displaced Pandits

Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi and his team reached Jammu from Delhi on the morning of January 20, 1990. In the coming days, they witnessed the mass exodus of people from the valley. There was no let off to the killings of the Kashmiri Pandits in the valley. Print and electronic media, such as TV, did not mention the tales of the horror of paradise on Earth. The refugees were seen with their small baggage on the roads of Jammu and in the vicinity of Raghunath temple of Jammu city. The entire brigade of ASKPC was physically and mentally involved in receiving and rehabilitating the displaced Kashmiri Pandits, for whom there was none to care. One day while walking along Shiva Mandir Road in Parade Jammu, Amarnath ji saw one Kashmiri family with baggage getting down from a bus. He went closer to them and asked them as to where they were going. He had this suspicion that people had started leaving the valley out of fear which made him make this enquiry. The family hesitated in giving the details, so they first lied and said that they had come to attend a wedding. Amarnath ji was not convinced, and in his soft and assuring tone, he said, "Please do not hesitate in front of me, I am Vaishnavi, and I will try to be of some help to you." Then the family opened up and told him about the life threats they had received, ultimately leading them to leave their home. Amarnath ji took them first to Geeta Bhawan, which had some rooms and accommodated them temporarily.

All-State Kashmiri Pandit Conference, Sanatan Dharam Yuvak Sabha, under the leadership of Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, approached the Sanatan Dharam Sabha Jammu for accommodating the displaced Hindus in Geeta Bhawan, Parade Ground, Jammu. The latter readily accepted the request, and many Kashmiri Pandit families were accommodated there. Kashmiri Pandit Sabha, Amphala Jammu, also accommodated as many displaced families in its rooms as possible. Its president Dr Kaushalya Wali took personal pains to rehabilitate the refugees. Only a few could afford to live in rented rooms. The bad news for the community leaders was that many Pandit families, especially from villages, could not leave for obvious reasons. These families were compelled to



face the terror and its aftermath in the years to come. Javed Mir alias Javed Nalka, Bitta Karate, Yasin Malik and many other militants were responsible for the killings of Kashmiri Pandits and the security personnel from December 1989 to March 1990. They continued their mission of terror along with their Pakistani counterparts for years to come. The large-scale exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from Kashmir and the massive concentration of these displaced people in Jammu city, Udhampur and other cities in the country worried the central and state governments on the one hand and the Kashmiri Pandit leadership on the other. The battle for survival by the Kashmiri Pandits started from here, and the struggle is still not won entirely. There was tremendous support from the various Hindu organizations, temple associations and the religious organizations of Jammu in helping the displaced peace-loving citizens in their relief and rehabilitation work. The RSS think tank of the country and the BJP leadership took the initiative along with the Kashmiri Pandit leadership to initiate certain measures of rehabilitation of the people in need at that hour. Immediate relief of whatsoever kind was possible could be made available to the refugees virtually on the roadside. Shri Kidarnath Sahani, the then president of Delhi BJP and Indresh Kumar, the then regional pracharak of RSS for J&K and Himachal Pradesh, were supervising the entire relief and rehabilitation work conducted by the volunteers of the organization. The government was worried but not seen in action.

In Delhi, Kashmiri Samiti and All India Kashmiri Samaj took the onus on themselves and left no stone unturned in rehabilitating the victims of terrorism in Kashmir. In other states, the Kashmiri Pandit organizations took the responsibility on their shoulders along with the RSS BJP combine to ensure that the affected people were treated well in their rehabilitation and relief. In Jammu, the involvement of the RSS and BJP combine was visible in serving the displaced community along with Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi's organization. The job was facilitated when an organization called Jammu and Kashmir Sahayata Samiti came into existence in April.



In the month of February 1990, Shri Kidar Nath Sahani, ~~of~~ <sup>of</sup> BJP and In-charge of Jammu & Kashmir, came to Jammu and addressed a huge gathering of displaced KPs totally desperate with no shelter and refuge. RSS Jammu arranged it under the guidance of Shri Indresh Kumar, Pracharak RSS. Shri Kidar Nath Sahani declared from the stage the formation of J&K Sahayata Samiti. Shri Vaid Vishu Dutt ji was declared President of Jammu Kashmir Sahayata Samiti. Shri Chaman Lal Gupta & Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi were Vice Presidents, Shri Subash Gupta, General Secretary, Shri. H.L. Chatta, Secretary, Shri M L Malla & Shri Harji Lal, Jad executive members from KPs.

Shri H.L. Chatta, Shri Malla & Shri P.N. Tingloo were assigned the duty of receiving and arranging the temporary boarding and lodging of KPs coming in bulk from the Valley, totally harassed and desperate after consulting the administration. Shri Vijay Bakaya was the Divisional Commissioner, and Shri B R Kundal, the Relief Commissioner; the post was created on a war footing. Shri N N Koul was in charge of registering the displaced KPs. Shri Indresh Kumar ji arranged Geeta Bhawan as the Head Office for operational work to be conducted on a war footing.

The Samiti had seven members, and Shri Hridaynath Bhat was the cashier cum accountant, and he was assisted in his job by Shri Pushkarnath Kotwal and Shri Girdharilal ji. Shri Makhanlal Aima, the reputed social activist and one-time RSS pracharak, had floated the idea of forming the Sahayata Samiti in the well-organized meeting of the RSS. It was he who had given the blueprint for forming the Samiti. It was now the joint venture of ASKPC, Yuvak Sabha headed by Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi and Jammu Kashmir Sahayata Samiti, which created hope for the community in exile to continue their smooth living in the days to come. The Samiti received aid in cash and kind from the people of the country. This became possible only after a nationwide appeal was made by the Sahayata Samiti to aid and assist the refugees. The refugees gathered in Jammu after their mass exodus from Kashmir and some parts of Jammu



province. Proper distribution of relief material was ensured by the leaders of the Sahayata Samiti though much was expected to be achieved in this regard.

After the formation of Sahayata Samiti, an appeal was made for the first time to the countrymen to stand up united to help the Hindus of Kashmir and some parts of Jammu province, who were the victims of ethnic cleansing. Shri Utpal Koul and Shri Shailendra Aima played an important role in this regard. The appeal was heard widely and responded to by sending daily-use items for the displaced people.



Amarnath Vaishnavi, Motilal Malla, Niranjana Nath Koul, Ashok Koul,  
Balji Langoo, Pyarelal Bhat & others

Meanwhile, some new faces from the Kashmiri Pandit community made their entry into the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh as regular swayam sevaks. They contributed their might in serving the community in distress as disciplined soldiers of the ASKPC and Sahayata Samiti. They rendered their cooperation to Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi and Shri Heeralal Chatta and were quick to distribute the relief material to every family living in different areas of Jammu.



Prominent among these new entrants were Shri Heeralal Bhat, Shri Bhushan Lal of Nadimarg, Shri Bharat Bhushan Gosani and Shri Avatar Krishan Trakroo. These youngsters were, on earlier occasions, also active in their social work in Kashmir before their displacement.

The famous proverb, 'like father, like son', suits in the corollary of events. In 1947 when Pakistani raiders invaded Kashmir, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, the true face of Kashmir as it was believed at that time, had left the valley in a huff. However, he later came back after a certain interval and played an important role so as not to lose political support in Kashmir in future. The same scene was repeated in the Kashmir Drama in January 1990 when Dr Farooq Abdullah left Kashmir for London immediately after relinquishing his charge as the Chief Minister of State after the imposition of Governor's rule. Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, therefore, questioned Dr Farooq's willful absence from the scene. He also questioned the deliberate silence of the pseudo-secular politicians, journalists and human rights activists in the country due to their inaction while the genocide of the minority community was being carried out. While raising this question on various forums, he demanded that the responsibility for this carnage be fixed. The situation in Kashmir resulted in the Hindu youth being in a fit of rage in Jammu, a Hindu-majority area. Jammu was on the verge of instigating communal riots. However, the timely intervention of Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi and his team jointly with the RSS, averted such a move.

In the year 1990 itself, hope to combat terrorism gained momentum when a policy was framed by the government of India to equip the people of the militancy-prone areas in Jammu with arms. As many as 26000 personnel were given arms by the government in the militancy-prone areas to take on the militants. These areas were the hilly districts of Doda, Kishtwar, Reasi, Udhampur, Rajouri, Ramban, Kathua, Poonch, Jammu and Samba. The personnel were distributed into more than 4100 groups named Village Defense Committees.



## Sahayata Samiti Initiates Registration of Displaced Kashmiri Pandits

The displaced lot had to face problems on various fronts; their employees' salaries were to be regularized since they were without compensation for months together. This was not possible unless the employees could have been registered as displaced lot in the records of the government. These and other related problems could not be solved in one go. The leadership of the community could not see eye to eye with the government on vital issues, which resulted in a delay in solving the problems of the displaced people. The months

from January 1990 to May 1990 saw protests from Kashmiri Pandits, which in turn invited lathi-charge and injuries to the people demanding justice. The massive participation of the people started shaking the authorities through rallies which were patronized by the veterans of the community namely Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, Shri Heeralal Chatta, Shri Motilal Malla, Shri



Pushkarnath Karnail, Shri Makhanlal Aima, Shri Shri Durga Prashad Koul Pyarelal Badgami, Shri Triloki Nath Khosa, Shri DN Kissu, Dr. Agnishekhar, Shri Ashwini Chrangoo, Dr. Ajay Chrangoo, D P Koul and Shri Gopi Kishan Muju. Here, Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi challenged the government by daring to set in motion the registration counters at Gita Bhawan under the directives of ASKPC. Shri Durga Prasad Koul was given the charge of enlisting the names of the displaced Kashmiri Pandit community members in the register as he was among the front-ranking leaders of All-State Kashmiri Pandit Conference Sanatan Dharam Yuvak Sabha Sheetal Nath, Srinagar.

Shri Heeralal Chatta was entrusted with the noble task of supervising the registration process to ensure its smooth working. Shri Chatta was all along the most trusted associate of Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi. As early as 1984-85, Shri Chatta had dared to snatch away a grenade from the hand of a militant and had handed it over to the local police in Baramulla. He had also unearthed the



hidden activities of the militants by giving vital clues to the police in Baramulla. On such an occasion, when the police were interrogating Shri Heeralal, a daring son of the soil, Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi had stood by him.

The task of registering the displaced community also went ahead in other states of India where they were dwelling temporarily. As stated earlier, the local Pandit organizations in those states also came forward to facilitate the registration and rehabilitation process. The prominent Kashmiri Pandit leaders who remained vigilant and guided this whole affair in different states included Shri H L Nehru, Shri C L Gaddoo, Shri J N Kaul, Shri D N Munshi, Shri Nanaji and Dr LN Dhar in Delhi, Shri A K Nehru with his team in Chandigarh, Shri Makhan Lal Mattoo in Mumbai, Shri Chamanlal Razadhan in Pune, Shri RK Mattoo in Bengaluru and Shri Surender Kak in Hyderabad. Such activities were also seen in Lucknow, Indore and Faridabad because of the concentration of the displaced community in these cities. Shri Pushkarnath Vakil accommodated many displaced Pandits in the Hindu Mahasabha auditorium in New Delhi. As a Hindu Mahasabha activist, he assured their proper living.

The government had no choice but to recognize these registration centres and follow other majors contributing to solving the pending problems regarding relief and rehabilitation. The government started the registration process much later, and they referred to the records created by the Sahayata Samiti pertaining to the registration of displaced people to fill the gaps in their official records. It is worthwhile to note that ASKPC was in coordination concerning registration and other activities with all these registration counters in the different parts of the country. To facilitate the entire relief work, it was thought necessary to have different forums in Jammu, such as the forum for traders, government employees and pensioners, the forum for private employees and the forum for the displaced Kashmiri villagers or farmers. It was but natural for the community leaders to be in touch with the authorities at the helm of affairs. So Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi and his colleagues, including Shri Makhanlal Aima, had almost daily contact with the governor Shri Jagmohan and the



Divisional Commissioner, Shri Vijay Bakaya, to have deliberations and to expedite solutions.

### Food and Shelter for the Displaced Community- Negotiations with the Government

Immediately after completing the registration process at Geeta Bhawan Jammu, Shri Kidar Nath Sahani, President, Delhi BJP, monitoring the activities of displaced Kashmiri Pandits cell of Bhartiya Janta Party, reached Jammu to have an on-the-spot assessment of the problems of the Kashmiri Pandits in exile needing immediate attention. Shri Sahani was also invited by Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, President of ASKPC, to attend its meeting to discuss some burning issues regarding the relief and rehabilitation of the displaced Kashmiri Hindus. In this meeting, Vaishnavi drew the attention of all the participants towards the decision of the Punjab High Court in the late 1980s. According to this, financial assistance was provided to the victims of militancy in Punjab. Shri Kidar Nath Sahani and all other members agreed with Shri Vaishnavi's proposal that a demand be put before the government for sanctioning monthly financial assistance to the victims of Kashmir who were forcefully thrown out on the Punjab pattern.

Immediately after this meeting, Shri Kidar Nath Sahani, Shri Vaishnavi Ji and Shri Heeralal Chatta met the Governor of the state Shri Jagmohan in this regard. Governor called the meeting of the bureaucrats within days, and it was decided that the directives of the Punjab High Court providing monthly financial assistance to the victims of the militancy in Punjab be followed in Jammu and Kashmir also. Thus, it took the government no time to apply the Punjab High Court's decision, of course with certain modifications, in the J&K state. In the first instance, the Government sanctioned an amount of Rs 500 monthly to every displaced family in Jammu and elsewhere in the country who had no source of income to run their families. The government employees whose salaries were stopped because of the exodus from the valley were also



entitled to receive such government assistance pending the settlement of their cases. The amount of monthly relief in due course of time got enhanced from time to time, reaching the present limit of Rs10000 per family. In the late 1990s, the issue of displaced Kashmiri Pandit Community boys and girls who were compelled to discontinue their school and college education due to the exodus was discussed with the government by ASKPC. Of course, the government, with Shri Vijay Bakaya as the divisional commissioner of Jammu, took a positive view, and these students were allowed to continue their studies in Jammu schools and colleges in the evening class.

Amarnath Vaishnavi became a conduit between the Kashmiri Pandit masses and the government of J&K. Shri Vijay Bakaya, who represented the government in the matters of relief and rehabilitation, worked closely with Amarnath ji and made it possible to convince the higher-ups in the government to provide support to the displaced community by providing tents to live in, the cash relief and re-instating of schools and colleges.

The problems were still numerous. The loss of the traders was to be assessed so that they could get compensation from the government. Similarly, the houses of the minority community and religious places that had been burnt down in the valley were to be rebuilt after estimating the total damages and losses. The brutal killings of the minorities in Kashmir, especially those who still lived in the valley, were a matter of concern for the Kashmiri Pandit leaders in exile.

On 9<sup>th</sup> February 1994, Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi led a delegation of Kashmiri Pandit leaders and intellectuals to the ambassadors from Germany, Greece, Norway and Belgium. The delegation apprised the ambassadors of the atrocities and human rights violations committed by the terrorists in Jammu and Kashmir State. It was impressed upon the ambassadors that the ongoing insurgency in J&K was not only an indigenous uprising against India, but there was also an attempt made by Mullah Mafia, represented by the Hurriyat Conference, to subvert democratic institutions and to create disaffection among the ethnic groups in J&K. The delegation had gone well prepared with



pieces of evidence of atrocities supported by literature and photographs which they handed over to these ambassadors to make them feel the pain which the Kashmir Pandit community was inflicted upon. The delegation included Professor B L Fotedar, Shri S L Tikoo, Shri K.L. Gadroo, Justice J.N. Bhat, Shri B L Bhat, Shri Siddharth Zarabi, Shri Ajay Bamzai and Shri Heeralal Bhat.

### Securing Reservations in Educational Institutions across India

In March 1994, "The Apartheid in Education" was thoroughly discussed in a special meeting which was arranged by Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi at Shri Triloki Nath Shalla's residence in Jammu. Shri Kidar Nath Sahani was also invited from Delhi specially to preside over this meeting. The meeting was attended by Shri Ajay Bharti, Shri Heeralal Chatta, Shri Pushkar Nath Karneil, Shri Motilal Malla, and Shri Heeralal Bhat.

The meeting addressed the problems of the boys and girls of the Kashmiri Pandit community and also of the security forces on duty in Jammu and Kashmir, who, because of the odd circumstances in the state, were unable to pursue higher technical education and had no proper direction to follow after passing their 12<sup>th</sup> examination. It was, therefore, decided to discuss this issue with the RSS leadership.

Immediately after this, a well-attended meeting of the RSS, which was chaired by Shri Indresh Kumar, Prant Pracharak, Shri Kidar Nath Sahani and Shri Vaishnavi Ji, elaborated on the issue and suggested that efforts were required to pursue imparting technical training to the displaced boys and girls of the J&K state with the states where Bhartiya Jantā Party was the ruling party or had the edge over other political parties. All eyes got practically focused on Maharashtra State.

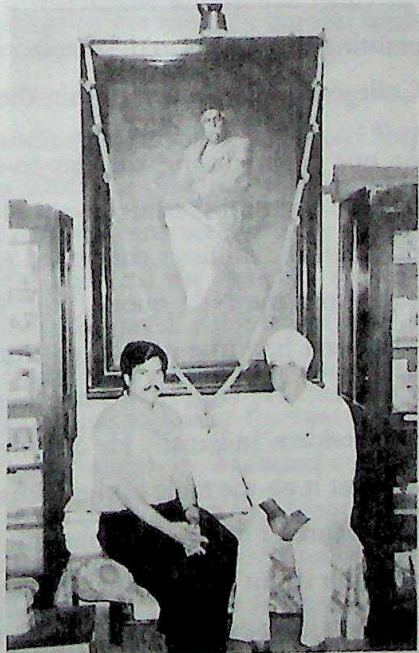
In the second week of April, the RSS think tank decided to send a two men delegation of Kashmiri Pandits to Mumbai to vigorously pursue the matter of seeking admission of the boys and girls of the Kashmiri Pandit community and the affected wards of the security forces on duty in the state in various



disciplines, in the technical institutions of Maharashtra state. Shri Indresh Ji called on Shri Vaishnavi Ji and Shri Heeralal Bhat, a young Swayam Sevak originally from Buchoo Tral District Pulwama of J&K state. Shri Indresh Kumar prepared them to move to Mumbai to pursue the matter.

Shri Heeralal Bhat is one among such RSS Swayam Sevaks who had joined the RSS Shakha in the decade of 1980 with Dr. Ashwani Wangnoo, Dr Pradeep Mattoo, Shri Susheel Wattal, Shri Ravi Jogi, Shri Raj Nath Jogi and Shri Ramesh Ganjoo. Shri Hira Lal Bhat was taken as an executive member of the All-State Kashmiri Pandit Conference Sanatan Dharam Yuvak Sabha Sheetal Nath, Srinagar, by Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi in 1987 when he was elected its president. Shri Hira Lal Bhat continued in the Sabha till 1989.

Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi and Shri Hira Lal Bhat left for Mumbai on 21<sup>st</sup> April 1994. They straightway went to see Shri Bansal, the head of the BANSAL'S Trust, a charitable organization, to seek the help of the trust for the uprooted Kashmiri Pandit community. On 23<sup>rd</sup> April, they both went to the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sang office in Central Mumbai and met various RSS leaders. Here Vaishnavi Ji had a face-to-face talk with Prof. Rajinder Singh, the Sarsangh Chalak of RSS, who was luckily present in the office. Prof Singh, who was affectionately called Raju Bhaiya in RSS circles, and Amarnath ji exchanged pleasantries. Raju Bhaiya surprised Shri Vaishnavi and said, "Let us participate in a Marathon no matter if we are above 70." Both of them were seen in a laughing mood.



On 24<sup>th</sup> April, Shri Vaishnavi and Shri Hira Lal Bhat reached Maharashtra Ashram at Andheri to attend the



Karyakarini meeting of RSS slated for discussing the future of the displaced and victimized boys and girls of Kashmir. Sah karyavah of Maharashtra RSS Shri Suresh Rao Ketkar, Shri Paresh Bhat, a renowned social activist, Shri Vimal Kedia, RSS Activist, Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi and Shri Hira Lal Bhat were present in the meeting, among others. Shri Vimal Kedia was asked to coordinate between the delegation of Kashmiri Pandits and Shri Gopi Nath Munde, the leader of the opposition in the Maharashtra assembly.

Shri Om Prakash Tiwari, the editor of Hindi Blitz, also contacted the delegation. Shri Gopi Nath Munde and both Vaishnavi Ji and Shri Hira Lal Bhat exchanged views on the Kashmir events, and serious deliberations were held on the burning problems of the students of the displaced community. Thereafter, a meeting was arranged between the Kashmiri Pandit delegation and the education minister of Maharashtra by Shri Hashu Advani, a BJP M.L.A. Later, Shri Gopi Nath Munde accompanied Shri Vaishnavi and Shri Heeralal Bhat to Shri Sharad Pawar, the Chief Minister of Maharashtra. The meeting between them took place in Sansad Bhawan of Maharashtra wherein the Chief Minister of Maharashtra assured the delegation of help in respect of granting admissions to the displaced educated youth in the Technical Training Colleges of Maharashtra within the purview of the law.

At one time, during the day-to-day deliberations, when Shri Gopi Nath Munde and Shri Hashu Advani pleaded the case strongly with the education minister, the minister concerned said that he would see if he could get some seats from the NRI quota (Non-Residents of India). On hearing this, Shri Vaishnavi Ji, a true patriot, got furious and resented the education minister's statement. He said, "On what account have the patriots of Kashmir become non-resident Indians?". He quickly got up and took his turban from his head, and put it on the table of the minister, saying loudly, "I beg to you for seeking admissions of the worthy sons and daughters of the displaced Kashmiri Pandit community in professional colleges in Maharashtra for they are the worst sufferers because of the turmoil in the J&K state. The only fault of this community is that it is patriotic, for which it was thrown out of the valley".



These utterances of Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi created commotion in the room. Those outside the room, particularly the media, came running to talk to Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi. The gentry outside the room turned into a crowd. The minister in the chair remained speechless. These utterances moved Shri Gopi Nath Munde and Shri Hashu Advani and pacified Vaishnavi Ji. It was a rough time for Shri Hira Lal Bhat to deal with the media persons and to handle the participants in the meeting, to bring them back on track. However, the meeting continued and ended on a positive note. The issue now took the shape of a proposal which remained pending in the files for a few months. In the meantime, Shri Vaishnavi and Shri Hira Lal Bhat continued to meet some eminent personalities of society, yielding influence in the political circles to mount pressure on the authorities to move the file in the right direction. These included Shri R.C. Shivpuri, Vice President, the Indian Express group; Shri Moti Kaul, a dedicated social activist; Shri Satish Kaul, leading a London-based MNC called Pilsner and Shri Ashok Pandit. They all warmly received Shri Vaishnavi and Shri Hira Lal Bhat at their residences and assured them of their help. General Secretary Vivekanand Kendra Kanyakumari, Shri G Vasudev also provided a helping hand to the delegation to get them in contact with different politicians in this regard.

During their twelve-day stay in Mumbai, Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi and Shri Hira Lal Bhat spent only Rs1800 out of Rs 3000 they had received from the organization. The balance amount of Rs 1200 was returned by them to the headquarter in Jammu. The amount Rs1800 included the expenses of two-time meals and the amount spent on taxis for local travel. After reporting the matter to Shri Kidar Nath Sahani in New Delhi, they reached Jammu in the 1<sup>st</sup> week of May. Shri Kidar Nath Sahani continued to follow the case at the political level. Meanwhile, the Congress government in Maharashtra got replaced by the Shiv Sena, and BJP combine in early 1995 with Shri Gopi Nath Munde as the Deputy Chief Minister of Maharashtra. On the direction of Shri Kidar Nath Sahani, Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi now met the leaders of the Maharashtra Shiv Sena and BJP leaders, including Shri Bala Sahib Thackeray

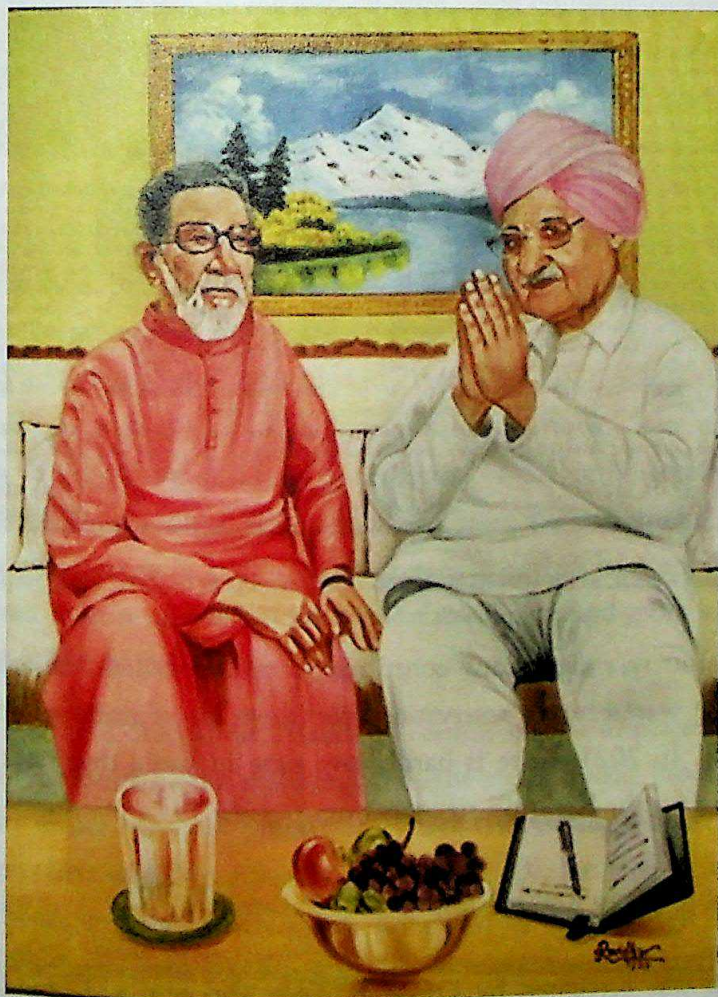


and Shri Gopi Nth Munde. Shri Munde was already in touch with the developments that had taken place in the case of granting admission to the displaced Kashmiri boys and girls in Maharashtra. However, the concerned file started moving in the right direction, but the only problem that seemed to arise was facing the wrath of the domiciles. Here, Shri Amarnath opined that let one seat each be added to the existing fixed number of seats in every professional college in Maharashtra. This proposal was agreed upon after having discussions with the Director of Technical education. This proposal, however, needed legislative approval. Both the Shiv Sena and BJP played a positive role in the Maharashtra Assembly, and legislative approval was sought in a very short period. Thus, the way was paved for seeking admission of the wards of Kashmiri Pandits and the wards of Security Forces placed on duty in Jammu and Kashmir, in the professional colleges of Maharashtra, in a special quota set for the purpose. Initially, this concession was granted only in the field of engineering but in the years that followed, the benefits of this concession were extended to other disciplines as well.

In June 1995, ASKPC, headed by Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, held a conference in Chander Baga Community Hall at Canal Road, Jammu which was attended, among others, by Shri L K Advani and Shri Kidar Nath Sahani. Shri Motilal Malla and Shri Heeralal Chatta, who were present at the conference, moved a resolution requesting the Government of India to arrange to provide admission facilities to the K.P. boys and girls and the wards of the Security forces placed on duty in J&K, in the universities of India. This conference had to face the black flag demonstration of the Panun Kashmir faction. Among other demonstrators, Dr. Agnishekhar and Dr. Ajay Chrangoo were also present. However, the Conference ended on a happy note and the follow-up action in the matter that came up in the resolution was slow. However, many presentations by Shri Amarnath and leaders of other K.P. organizations, particularly the All India Kashmiri Samaj, yielded results, and the case continued to run in the right direction.



It was only when the National Democratic Alliance Government headed by BJP came to power in 1999 that the Human Resource Development Ministry, Government of India, headed by Shri Murli Manohar Joshi and his secretary in the said ministry, Shri M K Kaw's role in the sanctioning of the proposal of reserving the seats for the displaced K.P. boys and girls in the universities of the country was significant. A notification was issued to all the universities in the country to go ahead with the granting of admission to the candidates who came under the displaced Kashmiri Pandits quota and to all others coming under the purview of such a quota.





Almost all the Kashmiri Pandit organizations expressed gratitude to Shri Bal Thackeray, Shri Gopi Nath Munde in Maharashtra and Shri Murli Manohar Joshi and Shri M K Kaw in Delhi for their role in having done the needful in rehabilitating the displaced Kashmiri youth in universities for completing their higher studies.

**Tribute to Amarnath Vaishnavi**  
**Remembering Amarnath Vaishnavi**


*One day the Sun asked the entire world during sunset, "Who will work in my absence?". Everyone remained silent but the earthen lamp (diya) whispered, "I Will Try My Level Best". It is not the size but the attitude that shines.*

It was the peak summer of 1990. For the first time we were facing the scorching heat of Jammu. After our forced exodus from valley we were struggling/agitating as students to get admissions in the govt. schools & colleges of Jammu, which was denied to us in the first instance. One day we organized a protest rally from Shiv Mandir to Mubarak Mandi. About 5000 migrant students, mostly teenagers, shouting slogans for getting admissions. After passing through the bazaars of old city we reached Mubarak Mandi. There was no one from the administration to hear us.

Soon a middle aged man came & welcomed us, as if we were his own children. Most of us did not know him. He was already on a hunger strike there, agitating for some cause of the displaced community. He was wearing a turban, having a tilak on his forehead & there were some wrinkles on his face. He attended to us & understood our problem. Then he took a few of our representatives to Div. Com. Office & arranged our meeting with a white haired officer (Sh. Vijay Bakaya Ji, then Divisional Commissioner, Jammu). We submitted our memorandum to Bakaya Sahab. It was almost 3 p.m. We were feeling thirsty. Somehow he arranged some water for us. Finally we ended our agitation & returned back to our respective homes (rented/tented). But that wrinkle faced middle aged man stood like a hard rock thereafter for our cause. He kept on highlighting our problems to the advisors of then Governor & to other higher officers of the State Administration. After a few days, we got admission in the Govt. Schools & Colleges of Jammu as migrant students.

Then he went miles away, travelled across the length & breadth of India & finally succeeded in arranging admissions of some of our students in the professional colleges of the country.

Today I bow my head in the name of that person. That person was none other than Pt. Amarnath Vaishnavi, a selfless & dedicated social worker. After his passing away 6 years ago, a great void was created which has not been filled till date.



**Er. Vinod Kumar**  
**Roop Nagar, Jammu**

Mr. Vinod Kumar, in his tribute to Pandit Vaishnavi, shares his first-hand experience  
 (Published in Shuhul Tap)

Pandit Vaishnavi's significant contribution to the exiled Kashmiri Pandit community was securing reservations for them in educational institutions nationwide. In 2021, there is hardly any state in India that does not have reservations for the Kashmiri refugees.

### Petition on Human Rights Violations in Kashmir

A petition was presented by Dr M K Teng and Shri C.L. Gadoo to the Chairman of the Joint Human Rights Commission for Minorities in Kashmir

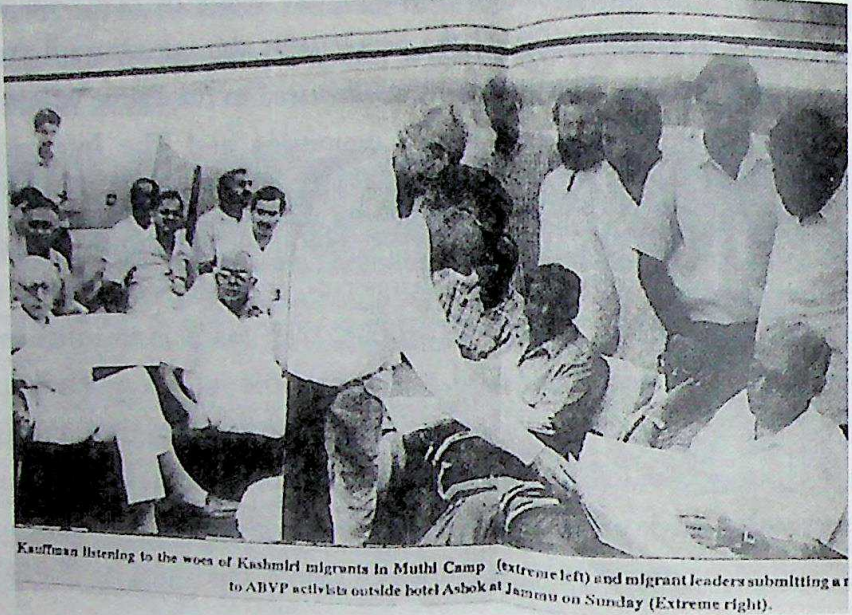


in the wake of the exodus of Kashmiri Hindus from Kashmir on January 19, 1990. It was stated that human rights are recognized by the entire community of civilized nations of the world as part of the rights of man, which are inviolable and unassailable for all the people who also constitute humanity without any exception. This petition was addressed to the Prime Minister of India, The National Human Rights Commission and The International Human Rights Commission. The petition said that the small and helpless community of Kashmiri Hindus and other Kashmiri communities, suffering for their belief in Nationalism and democracy, were the worst sufferers of human rights violations. As per the petition, they continue to suffer in the aftermath of this tragedy and lead a miserable life in the camps and the townships created for them in Jammu, and no one listens to their anguished cries. In contrast, the terrorists and their supporters in the state and Pakistan have received enough media attention worldwide. The petition, among other things, said that terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir, motivated by ideological commitments to a Muslim crusade, was a greater human rights violation and must not be forgotten. So, it was said that there was an imperative necessity for a bold and unconventional endeavour to identify the content and contours of violence which had ravaged the state. It was also emphasized that the perspective in which the infringement of human rights in Kashmir should be assessed must be described clearly. The petition also mentioned that any enquiry predetermined by political considerations and social motivations, and preconceived notions about the nature of the violence and strife in the state was bound to be self-defeating.

In 1991, a British delegation visited the camps of the displaced Kashmiri Pandits to take stock of the sufferings brought about by the exodus. British labour party leader Mr. Neil Kinock listened to the people's woes. Those who were present there were Mr. Ashok Kumar Braroo, Dr. Susheel Watal and Mr. Niranjana Nath, among others. Later, the ASKPC team headed by Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, who was accompanied by Motilal Malla, Heeralal Chatta and Pushkarnath Karneil, met the British delegation in the Government guest



house in Jammu. They apprised Mr. Kinock of the situation of the displaced people, hoping the world community would know about their sufferings.



British delegation at Muthi camp

### Re-Writing History

The aggrieved Kashmiri Pandit community started writing their history in exile. The community remembered the day of 19<sup>th</sup> January every year as Holocaust Day. On this day, they hold protest rallies and organize seminars to vent their feelings that arose because of their victimization at the hands of separatists. During this night, for the first time, a call for Jihad was raised from the mosques of Kashmir, and a movement was started by the separatists to establish the Islamic State in Kashmir.

Similarly, Kashmiri Pandits observe the 13<sup>th</sup> of July every year as a black day because it was on this day in 1931 that the Hindu community in Kashmir became a victim of fundamentalism in Kashmir. For two years after the 1931 incident, no one dared to offer prayers at Hari Parbat temple. It was only when a Kashmiri Pandit youth from Ganpathyaar Srinagar named Shri Kailash Nath



Kalloo had dared to go door to door and persuade Hindu men and women from every Hindu house to offer their prayers in the temple.

The day of 14<sup>th</sup> September is remembered every year as Martyr's Day to pay homage to all the martyrs of the country. It was on this day that Shri Tika Lal Taploo was killed by terrorists in Kashmir for his loyalty to Mother India.

27<sup>th</sup> December is remembered as Chetna Divas in memory of Shri Prem Nath Bhat who was an advocate and an RSS Karyakarta. On this day, the Prem Nath Bhat Memorial Foundation gives awards to people who have made an exemplary contribution to society.

### Voice of Dissent - Exposing the Myth of Unity.

A few among the displaced Marxist Pandits of Kashmir who also stayed in Jammu in that hour of crisis got an opportune time to settle political scores with the RSS ideologue, Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi and his team. They arranged secret meetings with some of the youngsters associated with the ASKPC in Jammu. They prepared these youngsters to develop some catchy slogans to combat the movement of separatists in Kashmir. This group of youngsters thus came up with their agenda of a separate land for Kashmiri Pandits in Kashmir. This group was headed by Dr Agnishekhar.

ASKPC held a three-day conference in Jammu from July 13 to July 15, 1990, in which Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi was re-elected as the president of ASKPC. This conclave was also called by the name of "Hindu Convention". Various resolutions were also passed, among which resolution number four gained prominence. It demanded that conditions be created to facilitate the return of Kashmiri Pandits to the Valley safely and with honour. Meanwhile, before conditions were conducive for their return, a quasi-permanent settlement would be provided to the displaced community. A group of youngsters raised their voices of dissent against this resolution, giving birth to the organization called Panun Kashmir under the leadership of Dr



Agnishekhar. Dr Agnishekhar's team consisted of Dr Ajay Chrangoo and Shri Ashwini Chrangoo. Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi had considered Dr Agnishekhar and his team as the next line of leadership of ASKPC. This split shocked him in particular and the community in general. He expressed that the displaced community's voice could now be heard in different voices and that too differently. He had often conveyed to his team that Dr Agnishekhar was the best orator and a scholar and had the potential to lead the masses in crises. According to him, Shri Ashwini Chrangoo could mobilize the opinions of the masses while Dr Ajay Chrangoo could present the viewpoint of the organization to the masses and get buy-in for the same from them. In the same conference, a call was made for the first time to all the patriotic organizations of Kashmir to boycott July 13 as Martyrs Day and instead call it "Black Day". This was the day in 1931 when Hindu houses were looted, and Hindus were killed by the majority community as retaliation towards police action against them by the then government. The majority community called it Martyrs Day. Ever since Kashmiri Pandits have remembered this day as Black Day. This conference was attended by National and International media, drawing world attention towards the resolve of Kashmiri Pandits to move back to their homes and hearths from where they had been thrown out.

In December 1991, Panun Kashmir held a conference and passed a resolution called MARGDARSHAN. This resolution demanded a separate homeland for the displaced Kashmiri Pandit Community, which could be carved out in South Kashmir. This resolution had its basis in Resolution Four, passed by the Hindu Convention in July 1990. Panun Kashmir later split into three groups, each headed by the three aforementioned founder members of Panun Kashmir. This demand for a separate homeland continues to be the agenda of all three factions of Panun Kashmir.

ASKPC had the political slogan of a Kashyap State, which envisaged that the entire land of Kashmir belonged to all the Kashmiris, irrespective of the community they belonged to. They moved further to the central government led by Shri Chandrasekhar with the demand of a makeshift township in and



around the area beginning from Batarbalia in Udhampur up to Kud. The climate of this area also suited the Kashmiri community as they were not used to the hot climate of the plains. The central government actively considered this proposal and even surveyed the area, but unfortunately, the different voices from the split Pandit community and the change of central government did not allow the implementation of this proposal.

The top brass leadership of the RSS was also keen to have a young brigade of displaced Kashmiri Pandit Community which would be active within and outside the state. This brigade would aim to counter the disinformation campaign of the Kashmiri separatists and to reveal the facts about Kashmir to the rest of the country. Shri Sheshadhari, the All-India General Secretary of RSS, was quite ambitious to see the emergence of such an organization as soon as possible. The local RSS Prant Pracharak of J&K, Shri Indresh Ji, blessed Panun Kashmir and participated in its earlier programs. This could mean that the creation of Panun Kashmir suited the RSS rank. The thought of the RSS as such may have been pious, no doubt, but the timing of its implementation proved suicidal because of the chaos and confusion in society in trouble during those years.

Initially, Panun Kashmir had an everlasting impact on the minds of the trouble-torn community, especially the youth, with its revolutionary stance and the blessings and wholehearted participation of all the leading dignitaries of the community, namely Dr K N Pandita, Dr M K Teng, Dr Shakti Bhan, Dr K L Choudhary and many others as already mentioned. The hopes soon dashed to the ground when the organization split, which in turn disappointed the people. The suffering lot, therefore, pinned their hopes entirely on the leadership of Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi.

Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi's team, among others, consisted of Shri. Makhanlal Aima, Shri Harjilal Jad, Shri. Gopi Krishan Mujju, Shri. P L Kaul Badgami, Shri. M L Malla, Shri Heeralal Chatra and Shri. P N Tenglu. They were people of different thought groups. Some of these members left, and some



new members joined later. These newcomers included Shri O N Trisal, Shri R K Raina, Shri K L Gadroo, Shri Hitesh Bindroo, Smt. Kirti Kalla, Kamla Ji and Smt. Shama Handoo. Many of these members with different perceptions could not have liked to link ASKPC with the RSS, as was the wish of Shri Indresh Ji, the RSS pracharak of the state. Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi seemed to have resisted the pressure imposed by Shri Indresh Ji. He was pretty straightforward in explaining that ASKPC, which had been functioning since 1931, had represented the community all through and was led by a very diverse group of community members with different political ideologies. The members present in the ASKPC were also reluctant to toe the RSS line in this regard. This move of Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi was not well received by RSS. A new outfit called Jammu and Kashmir Vichar Manch came into existence in the year 1993-94. This organization is active even today in Delhi and Jammu and organizes socio-cultural activities for the community in exile. Shri T N Razdan took over as the National President of Jammu and Kashmir Vichar Manch, whereas Shri Anoop Kaul and Shri Ajay Bharti were its active members. Dr R.L. Bhat, a well-known social activist and writer, took over as the president of Jammu and Kashmir Vichar Manch, Jammu branch. It was under his leadership that the Sanjeevani Sharda Kendra, Jammu emerged as the cultural hub for the Kashmiri Pandit community in exile.

### SAAM Conference & Awakening Rallies

In the middle of 1991, Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) launched two-pronged programs which it called "The Save Kashmir Program". In its first phase, the ABVP activists from all states visited the country to create awareness among the masses about sponsored terrorism in Kashmir and the killings of innocent pro-Indian masses there. Dr Agnishekhar and all ABVP activists also participated in this program. Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi blessed him at the time of his departure for this tour. In the second phase, the ABVP, in September 1991, decided to march to Kashmir, and the march started from Delhi. Fifty thousand people participated in this program. They were received



in Jammu with all fervour but were held by the police at Udhampur. Dr Murli Manohar Joshi, the tallest leader of the BJP, marched to Kashmir in January and hoisted the Indian Tricolour in the historical Lal Chowk of Srinagar on January 26, 1992. CRPF Jawans saluted the flags, and the national anthem was sung. The scene was very colourful, and Kashmir seemed to be re-born from the chaotic conditions created from 1989 onwards.

Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi was simultaneously appointed as the Vice President of the state BJP in the year 1990. It was a period when he was awfully busy mitigating the sufferings of the people. Though he continued to hold dual responsibilities, he ultimately resigned from the party post only after one year. He took this step to be able to devote himself entirely to the services of the masses. His immediate concerns were to have a foolproof system of living for those who lived in torn tents, to make it possible to compensate the traders who lost everything in Kashmir, the agriculturists who had lost their land and those who lost their employment. While striving to get genuine demands fulfilled, the other Pandit organizations also worked in coordination with his team to a great extent. Thus, the mass upsurge could succeed in forcing the governments at the centre and in the state to come for negotiations with the KP leaders. Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi and his team were at the forefront while negotiating with the government authorities. Panun Kashmir leaders, including Dr Agnishekhar, Dr K L Choudhary, Dr Ajay Chhangoo and Shri Ashwini Chhangoo, were also among the front-ranking leaders in striving to strike some kind of deal with the authorities to end the stalemate. However, it was not possible to get all the demands fulfilled in the negotiations held from time to time. 1991 was a period of Dharnas and demonstrations and when delegations were led from Jammu to Delhi. While heading ASKPC, Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi led such types of delegations and demonstrations in Delhi in cooperation with BJP leaders, namely Shri L K Advani, Shri Madan Lal Khurana and Shri Kedarnath Sahani. He also led a big delegation of the displaced community to Shri Rajiv Gandhi, to the president of India and to the leaders of all the political parties to apprise them of the difficulties faced by



the community in exile. His group would always include Shri Moti Lal Malla, Shri Rajinder Kampasi, Shri Balkrishan Seru, Shri Harjilal Jad, Ashok Braroo and Shri Shibani Krishan Pandita. This group of youngsters was not swayed by the homeland slogan of Panun Kashmir and remained by his side till the end.

A rally known as the awakening rally was organized at a boat club in New Delhi as early as February 1992 by ASKPC and the J&K Displaced People's Cell of Bhartiya Janta Party, New Delhi. It was a mammoth public gathering addressed by Shri Kedarnath Sahani and Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi. He always started his public speeches with the slogan "Jaikara Har Har Mahadev". The slogan inspired people not to lose hope and fight for their cause with perseverance. He believed that they would surely attain their goal with this approach. Shri Vaishnavi apprised the people of India about the dangers ahead for the country, keeping in view the developments in Kashmir. He said, "Can it be possible to have Kashmir without its Hindu inhabitants?" He said that whatever happened on January 19, 1990, was a part of the efforts to erase the Indian culture in Kashmir because one of the largest and most painful exoduses of a specific community had taken place on that day. It was the ethnic cleansing of the minorities from Kashmir who were executed by the Jihadis in the valley. Killings of Pandits had started, and loud messages from the loudspeakers of the mosques clearly said, "Pandits leave the Valley, leaving behind your women, we want Pakistan without Pandits". Immediately after the rally, a big demonstration was held outside the Parliament House by a good number of Kashmiri Hindus as a mark of protest against the Central Government for calling a meeting with the separatists of Kashmir to discuss Kashmir while ignoring the representatives of the Kashmiri Hindus for all times.

Thus, the killings in Kashmir were brutal, and all this was done to take revenge on patriots who stood for India. In his last words, Vaishnavi cautioned Indians about Pakistan's ill intentions and prepared them to make a sacrifice for the country as a whole. In his address, Shri Kedarnath Sahani said it was surprising to see silence in the Indian and foreign media on an exodus that tarnished the valley's cultural fabric.



It was the inner desire of Shri Amarnath to restart the newspaper "MARTAND," for which he deliberated with his working committee members for days together to find out the ways and means to republish it, the publication of which had come to a standstill after 1989.

In May 1992, it was finally decided in the emergency meeting of ASKPC to restart the newspaper, for which some donation was also received from some eminent personalities. It was decided that Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi would be the editor-in-chief, Shri Ashok Kumar Braroo would be the editor, and Shri Shadi Lal Tickoo would be the sub-editor. The newspaper was restarted. Its circulation was well received by the community in Jammu and elsewhere for at least eight years. The paucity of funds afterwards came its way, and its publication ended again.

In the same year, the need for the revival of ASKPC came to the fore. It was felt that Jammu & Kashmir Sahayata Samiti and ASKPC, which were working together for the welfare of the displaced community, had caused some confusion in the rank and file of both the organizations. There was a need to demarcate the functions of both organizations and clear the doubts in the minds of the people about the responsibilities of both organizations. Therefore, ASKPC was revamped with the inclusion of new members and the exclusion of some old members. Shri Durga Prasad Kaul, a renowned social activist and ASKPC member, worked hard to arrange a historical conference in Jammu. The outgoing members of the organizations discussed it with the consent of its president Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi. On 11<sup>th</sup> October 1992, the historic conference of ASKPC was held in Dogra Hall Jammu under the title "SAAM". Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee was the chief guest of the conference. In his maiden speech, Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi expressed his painful feelings over the killings of people of all faiths in Kashmir during the previous few years. He held the successive governments responsible for their callous attitude in understanding the emergence of the militancy in Kashmir and for not being able to save the precious human lives of the patriots in the valley and some parts of Jammu province. Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, in his speech, lauded the



role of Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi and his organization and also Kashmiri Pandit Sabha, Jammu and other Kashmiri Pandit organizations in Jammu and other parts of the country for their dedicated services to their community which was under stress since 1990. He took a dig at the governments at the centre and also in the state of J&K for showing their negligence to a great extent to the problems which the displaced community from Kashmir and various parts of Jammu faced. Shri Vajpayee paid tributes to the martyrs, including Shri Tika Lal Taploo, Shri Neelkanth Ganjoo, Shri Sarvanand Premi, Shri Prem Nath Bhat, and Shri Musheer-ul-Haq, the then vice-chancellor of Kashmir University and also to all other men and women of all faiths who were killed for being patriots. Shri Vajpayee assured cooperation from the rest of the country to the refugees of J&K to ensure a peaceful settlement of their pending issues.

The "Saam Conference" resolution made it clear that unless the Pan Islamic Fundamentalism is entirely crushed in Kashmir, the rehabilitation of Kashmiri Pandits in Kashmir is impossible. The thrust point of this conference was the apartheid in education.

Battle lines were drawn by almost all the major Kashmiri Pandit organizations in the country to make their views heard by one and all inside and outside the country on the ethnic cleansing of Kashmir. These organizations also thwarted the evil designs of the vested interests who were bent upon spreading falsehood about the exodus of the Kashmiri Pandits and were denigrating the nation on the issue of militancy in Kashmir. These organizations arranged protest rallies, demonstrations, conferences and conventions in various parts of the country and overseas countries.

ASKPC, while observing Shradhanjali Divas on 14-Sept-1993, paid homage to all the Kashmiri Pandits and the security forces who became the targets of the Pakistan-sponsored militancy. This function was also attended by Smt. Sushma Swaraj. Speaking on this occasion, ASKPC President Pandit Amarnath



Vaishnavi flayed the administration for its failure to meet the demands of the community members in exile.



With Mrs. Sushma Swaraj

Recalling the experience after having been hounded out from the valley, Shri Vaishnavi observed that life in exile had proven no less horrifying than militancy itself because the unkind and callous attitude of the administration added miseries to the community in exile. He said that despite repeated appeals, the centre and the state governments had failed to redress the grievances of the displaced people. He demanded, among other things, quasi-permanent settlement, enhancement in relief and overhauling of relief machinery. He wanted safer zones to be created for the rehabilitation of Kashmiri Pandit refugees. Smt. Sushma Swaraj, in her address, said that it was shocking to see a secular tribe in the national capital, which was in-hospitable to the patriotic Indians. She said that the Indian Republic had not been able to ensure the safety of the patriotic people of Kashmir.



## Uniting The Community Amidst Divergent Views & Multiple Organizations

The martyrdom of the tallest BJP leaders Pandit Tikalal Taploo in September 1989 and Pandit Prem Nath Bhat, on 27<sup>th</sup> December 1989, in Anantnag, was the greatest loss to the Pandit community. Both of them were daring souls to combat the anti-patriotic movements in Kashmir. However, it was considered good luck for the community that Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, a missionary of his times and one of the top-ranking political and social leaders of the community in exile, took the onus of the ongoing struggle on his shoulders and continued his onward march with his dedicated group of activists. The leadership of the Pandit community was actually on tenterhooks to get their demands fulfilled. The immediate demand was to provide succour and proper facilities for the rehabilitation of the displaced community. The community also wanted to be declared as internally displaced people as per UN conventions. The leadership of the community was striving to make the voice of the aggrieved microscopic minority of Kashmir felt all over the world. The community wanted that the perpetrators of the genocide be punished.

The corollary of events which took place during the decade from mid-1990 to mid-2000 took everyone in the community in exile by utter surprise. Various social outfits/organizations started growing among the community in Jammu and other parts of India. These organizations did not work unitedly with already established, age-old and reputed Kashmiri Pandit organizations everywhere. The displaced community got confused while hearing these organisations' divergent viewpoints, which shattered their confidence to continue their battle for survival. The three factions of Panun Kashmir also started losing their mass support. Thus, under these circumstances, it was ASKPC on which the displaced people laid their trust in their onward struggle. An impression was gathered that every such organization followed its agenda, creating confusion in the rank and file of the community. These organizations included the All India Kashmiri Pandit Conference, All Parties Migrant Coordination Committee, Youth Wing of All India Kashmiri Samaj,



Displaced Kashmiri Pandit Organization, Migrants Welfare Forum, Roots in Kashmir, Nov Sone Kashmir and many other groups. In their separate programs, the factions of Panun Kashmir arranged Dharnas (protests), convened impressive seminars and conferences and arranged cultural meets in Jammu and various parts of India and other countries. These programs were appreciated and attended by the community members, and Panun Kashmir's popularity remained intact for a few years. The demand for a separate homeland raised as a movement by Panun Kashmir factions had perhaps gone well with the power centres in India. There was never any official comment by the Indian government either in favour or against the movement of Panun Kashmir. The stoic silence maintained by Shri Rajesh Pilot and Shri George Fernandez, both ministers in charge of Kashmir Affairs in UPA and NDA regimes, respectively, also indicated that the governments in power had decided to use the homeland issue as a tool to deal with the separatists of Kashmir and make them realize that those who made this demand were also part of the Kashmiri society and could not be taken for granted whenever there was any proposal to have talks on the Kashmir row. The Homeland movement of Panun Kashmir, however, got slackened in the subsequent years as the community which they represented heard the leaders of three factions in three different voices with no hope for them to get united under one leadership.

ASKPC undertook the responsibility of discussing the problems of government employees and traders of the displaced community with the government authorities with a view to finding solutions. However, some of the issues, particularly the problems of traders, remained unsettled and were pursued in the future. The traders and the private employees spent their lives with the help of financial relief sanctioned by the government. The displaced community organizations have always been negotiating with the government to increase financial assistance occasionally and even made the government agree to such increases. Some other displaced youth who were in private employment before their displacement in Kashmir were adjusted in various private organizations



in Jammu and other parts of the country with the joint efforts of Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi and BJP leader Shri Kidarnath Sahani.

Going through India's concerns about the militancy in Kashmir, one could see that the USA often exhorted India to talk to the Pak Military regime. New Delhi always showed its disinclination, though, under Mr. Vajpayee's charisma, Pakistan also came close to India in Agra from July 14 to July 16, 2001. The Indian Prime Minister, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, was determined to give peace a chance with Pakistan. He took the most challenging initiative, like his bus journey to Lahore and did not even put off his journey when Kargil was attacked in 1999. His persistence led to inviting General Musharraf to visit India, and despite the debacle in Agra, he did not lose hope but continued his efforts to search for peace with Pakistan. At the Agra summit, no other leader from the Kashmiri Pandit community except Dr Agnishekhar, convener of a faction of Panun Kashmir, was invited by the Vajpayee government for a luncheon meeting which was held in New Delhi before the scheduled Agra Summit.

It so happened that a continued tirade against the microscopic minorities of J&K state and the Armed Forces of India gained momentum. Some of the so-called human rights organizations and so-called peace restoring agencies on the National and International scene started campaigning against Indian interests ignoring the problems India faced due to ISI-sponsored terroristic attacks on its soil. On the National Front, some politicians and top-ranking journalists started telling lies about the happenings in Kashmir. They wrote columns and made speeches in various seminars, spreading falsehoods about Kashmir. Veteran Congress leader Shri Mani Shankar Iyer and Journalist Shri Kuldeep Nair almost spoke along similar lines. They said that Muslims in Kashmir were already disgruntled since 1988 with the government for its sinister designs towards the majority community in Kashmir. Therefore, the majority community was in trouble and convinced that the successive governments completely ignored them. These so-called peace lovers further said that this feeling compelled the majority community to have peaceful demonstrations in



Kashmir in 1988. However, with the coming of Shri Jagmohan as the governor of the state in January 1990, the situation had deteriorated. They said Shri Jagmohan facilitated Kashmiri Pandits to run from Kashmir to deal with the Muslims of Kashmir to annihilate them. So according to them, these events ultimately made the majority community in Jammu and Kashmir take to guns to save their lives.

These so-called secularists tried to ignore the facts that led to the persecution of ethnic minorities since 1947. They deliberately chose to ignore Pakistan and its Inter-Services Intelligence organization which aided and abetted terrorism in Kashmir. It is very unfortunate that such personalities were made the peace brokers and engaged in peace talks with their counterparts in Pakistan and the peace march at the Wagah Border to create goodwill between the two nations.

Shri Mani Shankar Iyer's peace mission called "AMAN KI AASHA" has simply fooled the country till today. While leading such types of delegations to Pakistan, he takes the country for a ride. His counterparts in Pakistan, Shri Gulam Nabi Fai, Shri Asad Durani, Shri Ehsan- ul -Haq and many others, have been closely associated with ISI of Pakistan from time to time and have been responsible for killing Indian Security forces and the patriots in Kashmir.

Smt. Humra Qureshi, an Indian writer, has in her book "The Untold Story of Kashmir" been kind enough to the local gunmen of Kashmir for calling them the sympathizers of Kashmiris for the services they render to the Kashmiris at the time of crisis. She is thus proving that these local militants, including Mohammad Yaseen Malik, are innocent. It appears that she, too, has decided to close her eyes towards the atrocities committed by the militants who engaged themselves in selective killings in Kashmir. She has been silent on the role of the local militants, some of whom are Farooq Ahmad Daar alias Bitta Karate, Javed Mir, Hamid Sheikh, Mohammad Maqbool Shala and many others, in perpetrating heinous crimes against humanity in Kashmir.

Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, while closely focused on all such events, could not remain silent and expressed his views as the President of ASKPC on various



issues. His onward march along with his team continued for years. He took into confidence the community organizations like Kashmiri Pandit Sabha Jammu, Panun Kashmir, Kashmiri Pandit Samiti Delhi, All India Kashmiri Samaj, J&K Vichar Manch and other community organizations in different states to combat and rebut the so-called secularists who were involved in malicious campaign against Indian Patriotism. He considered the cause of the community uppermost and was forthright in telling the countrymen about the happenings in Kashmir. Immediately before the exodus of 1990, almost all the organizations mentioned above made it clear to the countrymen that in the absence of any organized decision-making mechanism within the community and with no visible measures taken by the government both at the central and the state level, the Kashmiri Pandits could be led to complete annihilation. Consequently, every individual and every family took their own decision to leave Kashmir to save themselves along with their children. They took this step due to the prevailing circumstances in Kashmir, in which there was consistent violence directed at their community. They could not withstand the uncertainty of their lives while living in constant fear of being killed. It is pertinent to mention here that Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, during the early 1990s, would close his speech with one sentence, "Pandits were dead scared because there had been targeted killings of the Pandits". He would say that in the name of secularism, much had gone wrong in the recent years with Indian secularism, and that needed to be addressed. He said that it was not secular to turn a blind eye to the militancy-related activities in Kashmir and deny Jihadis' role in terrorist activities on Indian soil in recent years. Thus, he would say that the microscopic minority of Kashmir should not have been the subject of experiments several times in the secular laboratory of the valley. The Hindus of Kashmir had suffered physically, mentally and materially. Let efforts be made to make the valley safe for their living before any misadventure is conceived".

For a small community like Kashmiri Pandits, with political parties having overlooked their plight and media burying the story of disaster, it was an uphill



task to inform the country about India's largest forced displacement of its people after independence. As stated, the Kashmiri Pandit leadership didn't lag behind in publicising its woes.

Pandit Vaishnavi, in one of his press conferences in Delhi in the early 1990s, expressed freely that what had happened in Kashmir resulted from a well-thought conspiracy of creating ways and means to accomplish the task of ethnic cleansing in the valley. He said this when the art exhibitions displayed by some of the valley-based artists and sculptors in the country's capital were not deliberately attended by the country's creative artists, simply to prove their loyalties to the anarchists in Kashmir. He further said that instead of raising funds and memorials for the martyrs of Mother India to make the surviving security personnel feel proud of their services rendered unto the nation, these so-called progressive artists had waged war against India's forces by overlooking their sacrifices. He also said that the time had come when all nationalist forces should come together and expose these opportunists to strengthen national unity. He posed a question to the so-called progressive men and women in the country, asking them to explain why they should have a soft corner for the killers and not for those innocent men and women who were being killed by the Jihadis. He further said that Jihadis didn't even spare Prof Mushir-ul-Haq, who was the Vice-Chancellor of Kashmir University, Shri Harbans Lal Kheda, the general manager of H.M.T. Srinagar, a veteran poet and writer Shri Sarvanand Koul Premi and the renowned politician of Kashmir Shri Mustafa Mir of Lasjan.

Professor Saifuddin Soz, a leading Congress leader in the Valley, took no chance to doubt the Kashmiri Pandit leaders in exile for their clean speaking on the issue of the ethnic cleansing from the valley and from various parts of Jammu province in one of his articles entitled, "No Need to Pity Pandits" in the daily newspaper Hindustan Times on 27<sup>th</sup> of April 1995. He talked about the need for a commission of enquiry to establish that certain forces had started operating from January 1990 towards an exodus of Hindus.



This was immediately rebutted by Shri Ashwani Kumar Chrangoo, convener of the Panun Kashmir Movement. In his open letter to Prof Soz, he wrote that the author probably felt shy to name those forces understandably for reasons known to him. The forces were none other than the terrorists and secessionists, who would kill, loot and rape for the establishment of "Nizam-e-Mustafa" in the valley and who were given all types of support by all kinds of professional politicians in Kashmir.

The displaced community kept its journey moving in various directions. It was the year 1995 when Dr. Agnishekhar of Panun Kashmir led a delegation of displaced youth to Anandpur Sahib in Punjab to pay gratitude and respect to Shri Guru Teg Bahadur. A Kashmiri Pandit Delegation had met Guru Teg Bahadur under the leadership of Shri Kripa Ram Dutta, a Kashmiri Pandit, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century to fight against the onslaught of Aurangzeb, the then ruler of India to save the Kashmiri Pandits from conversion. It was then that Guru Teg Bahadur laid his life to save the Kashmiri Pandits. While addressing a gathering at Anandpur Sahib, Dr Agnishekhar laid stress on Hindu-Sikh unity, which he said was important to fight terrorism in India.

Displaced Kashmiri Pandits got some respite in 1995-1996 when the tents in which they lived after their exodus from Kashmir were replaced by Tenements by the government after many years of struggle by the community leaders in Jammu.

Pandit Amarnath was pained to notice that the outcries of his community were not adequately heard by the people at the helm of affairs and also by those who claimed themselves to be the champions of the cause of the victims of human rights violations. Despite everything, he was quite optimistic and did not choose to either condemn or blame anyone, even those responsible for the mushrooming growth of multiple organizations within the small community of Kashmiri Pandits. The existence of multiple voices originating from myriads of organizations was responsible for chaos and confusion and a lack of strong communication in a single voice from the Kashmiri Pandit community.



He and his team kept visiting the refugee camps on an ongoing basis to gather inputs about the various problems faced by the inhabitants. They, in turn, discussed these problems with the relief commissioners from time to time and worked together with the government officials to initiate the activities that would solve those problems. They kept the government officials on their toes and persuaded them occasionally to undertake activities for rehabilitating the refugees and recognizing their sufferings. He coordinated with Mr. Raman Bhalla, the minister in charge of relief and rehabilitation. Pandit Vaishnavi always appreciated Mr. Bhalla's concern towards the problems of displaced Kashmiri pandits.



## Chapter— 7

### Intensifying Battle Lines

**D**uring 1996 to 2000, relief measures were no doubt in process in the refugee camps in Jammu and other parts of the country to mitigate the sufferings of the displaced people. However, the sword of Damocles continued to hang over their heads, for they were living in uncertain and insecure conditions in various community centres lacking the basic amenities of life.

It was in the years 1995 and 1996 that on the outskirts of Jammu, some tenements were constructed in the areas of Muthi, Dhumana, Mishriwaala, Purkhoo, Nagrota and many other places to accommodate the displaced lot who were otherwise living in tents. Simultaneously the state government of the day, vide order number 324 GAD of 1995 dated 28-04-1995, ordered the displaced employees of militancy-affected areas to join their duties at their respective places of postings in Kashmir. Almost all the leaders of Kashmiri Pandits took a vow to fight against such a draconian order unitedly. They staged Dharnas and organized demonstrations in Jammu and other parts of the country. Leaders who were at the forefront were Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, Pandit T.N Khosa, Pandit M.L. Malla, Pandit R.K. Raina, Shri Agnishekhar, Shri Ashwani Chrangoo, Dr Ajay Chrangoo, Shri H.L. Chatta, Pandit O.N. Trisal and the presidents of various refugee camps. The delegation of all these leaders submitted a memorandum to the Divisional Commissioner of Jammu against such an order they called draconian. The battle continued for almost a



year, after which the state government was compelled to retreat from its earlier stand.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of May 1995, ASKPC, headed by Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, appealed for a strike in Jammu, taking serious note of the desecration of the Hindu temples and Shrines and gutting of religious places of Hindus and their houses in the valley by the fundamentalist forces. This act was the aftermath of the desecration of the holy shrine of Sheikh Nooruddin Noorani at Charar-i-Sharief.

It was immediately after the 1996 parliamentary and assembly elections that Dr Farooq Abdullah, then Chief Minister of J&K state, called on the Kashmiri Pandit community for talks on various issues of the displaced community, including their return to their places of birth. The ASKPC, headed by Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, rejected such an offer. Almost all other KP organizations, such as Kashmiri Pandit Samiti Delhi, All India Kashmiri Samaj Delhi, Panun Kashmir Factions, J&K Vichar Manch and All India Kashmiri Pandit Conference, opposed this move and cautioned the community that if the issue was not viewed seriously in the backdrop of the prevailing ground realities, it could lead to a much greater tragedy than the exodus.

This was the period when the displaced Hindus, particularly the displaced employees, were under stress because the government failed to meet their demands. The displaced community's leadership was busy fighting the cause of its employees. All such employees under the patronage of the ASKPC warned the government to immediately release and announce dislocation allowance, house rent allowance, and C.C.A. in their favour. They were also fighting for their promotional benefits, settlement of their pension cases and release of salaries of those employees whose salaries were stopped for various reasons. They had demonstrations in which many employees and Shri Vaishnavi were injured due to the police lathi charge.

While fighting the parliamentary elections as a BJP candidate in 1996 from Srinagar parliamentary constituency, Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi had not



forgotten the pool of miseries which the ethnic minority of Kashmir, particularly the Pandit community, was facing. From his well-attended election meetings, which he addressed in Jammu and Kashmir, it was evident that his focus was on the problems of the internally displaced citizens of his state. He was keen to solve all the problems of the affected people if elected. His priority was to declare the displaced people of the state as internally displaced people and safeguard their abandoned property in Kashmir. He had also planned to work to rehabilitate the internally displaced people by providing education and financial support for their children and working towards creating employment opportunities for them. However, he lost this election after securing 36000 votes.

He had a consensus with all the other KP organizations for not holding Assembly elections in 1996 until the displaced people's safe return was made possible. His top priority was to maintain a record of the ethnically cleansed citizens and their property.

In the last phase of 1996, Ms. Robin Raphael, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State, made an explosive statement on the Kashmir issue. She favoured the autonomy syndrome for solving the Kashmir issue. The ASKPC, with all its might, denounced the idea of autonomy, which it said could strengthen the dream of Dr Farooq Abdullah. Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi reacted sharply to this and called it U.S. interference in the country's internal affairs. He said that the autonomy policy revealed by Ms. Raphael is an indication of some sinister global plan devised by the U.S.A. The leadership of the community staged protests in Delhi and Jammu.

### Bias Unfolded by Human Rights Working Group

It so happened in 1994 when Mr. P V Narasimha Rao was the Prime Minister of India, Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee represented the Indian Government in Geneva to counter the Pakistani propaganda on Kashmir. A delegation of Kashmiri Hindus representing the displaced community, headed by renowned



scholar Dr Kashinath Pandita, also reached the scene. The other members of the delegation included Dr Ajay Chhangoo and Ashwani Chhangoo, Farooq Abdullah and Ghulam Nabi Azad, among others. This delegation rebutted point by point the charges made by the Pakistanis and highlighted the atrocities committed by Pakistan in aiding and abetting the terrorist activities in Jammu and Kashmir to exterminate the minorities of the State. Mr. Vajpayee admitted that the voice of Kashmiri Hindus was heard in Geneva by all concerned with seriousness and that his argument on Kashmir was strengthened with the support provided by this delegation. In this conference, Iran withdrew its support to Pakistan strengthening India's position in Kashmir.

The congress ideologues in India, known among the British as the soft-spoken politicians in the pre-independence era, had politely cooperated with the British government to fulfil the dream of the Muslim League to divide India into two parts. Professor Ishtiaq Ahmad, a Swedish scholar of Pakistani origin and author of many books, including "Pakistan is a Garrison State", in an interview with Pakistani journalist Shakil Chowdhary categorically stated that immediately after viceroy Lord Wavel announced a formula for having an interim government headed by pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, he was expecting Nehru to continue his dialogue with the Muslim League for its participation in the government in 1946. Mohammad Ali Jinnah, in clear terms, stated on 29th July 1946 that the Muslim League to date believed in constitutionalism, but now it would go for direct action. He further said that Muslims have five hundred times more guns because they are natural fighters, whereas Hindus do not know how to fight.

Professor Ishtiaq Ahmad said it had its effect when Muslims from Howrah reached the nearest station Calcutta on 16<sup>th</sup> August 1946 and killed Hindus en masse. He even said that in Punjab also, Muslims killed Hindus and Sikhs en masse from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> of March in 1947, which the Sikhs, to some extent, repulsed.



These facts and the brutalities of Muslim invaders, which razed to the ground the people constituting India's majority, should have made the congressmen ruling India after independence wiser not to oppose the rebuilding of the Somnath temple that Mohammad Gaznabi destroyed. The ruling congress party should not have been biased in its approach against the people whom they ruled after independence by influencing the architects of the constitution, the lawmakers and the bureaucrats of the country to protect pseudo-secularism. It is such a bias when offerings received in the temple premises are deposited into the government account, whereas the offerings received in the mosques are controlled and utilized by mosque authorities as per their own sweet will.

Whereas, Article 13 of the Indian constitution reserves the right of the persons belonging to the minority community to participate in the decision-making process at the national and appropriate regional level. The Hindu minority of Kashmir (Kashmiri pandits) have been deprived of this right till now. The logic behind this deprivation is that they are the Hindus who are part of the majority of India's population. While applying this yardstick for differentiating between the majority and minorities of the country, we, the Indians, forget that the Muslim majority of Kashmir, enjoying the majority rights of their state, can therefore stake no claim under the same logic to their minority rights which they still enjoy being a part of the minority Muslim community of India. The Muslim majority of Kashmir is thus enjoying majority and minority rights at both regional and national levels, respectively.

Having been pained by this dualistic approach in our own country, Dr. Kashinath Pandita, a renowned scholar and one of the architects of the Panun Kashmir organization, continued his struggle to reach the international human rights working group in Geneva in the year 1996-97. He attended its historical meeting held under the chairmanship of Mr. Asbjorn Eide of Norway. The working group attentively heard Dr. Pandita, and his views about the genocide of the Kashmiri Hindus were accepted. An addition was made to the list of minorities and was approved internationally. The new group called reverse minority was added to the list of minorities mentioning that any such majority



at the national level, like the Kashmiri Pandits in Kashmir, are included in this newly formed group. In the overall scenario, attempts have been made to downplay Hindu sentiments at every occasion and at every forum in India to make the politics of convenience grow and reach its heights. Article 30 of the constitution permits non-Hindus to have their educational institutions and other similar institutions open for teaching and preaching their religious scriptures. In contrast, Article 30(A) of the constitution debars Hindu educational institutions and similar institutions from such religious activities. Therefore, a need arises to come out of deep slumber and save ourselves as the country's citizens from such a dangerous communal divide.

### Pandits Seek Enquiry into the Exodus

It was also in the last phase of 1996 that the problem of displaced traders was highlighted by the All State Kashmiri Pandit Conference. It was suggested to the government that twenty lac rupees be paid to each displaced trader as was earlier agreed by the government. The demand was raised vigorously, but this could not be fulfilled by the government. However, Pandit Vaishnavi fought the battle until the end.

ASKPC also pleaded for the restoration of human rights in respect of the displaced people of its state in December 1996 on the eve of Human Rights Day. On this occasion, Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, in his address to the people, said that the worst types of cruelties, atrocities and crimes committed in Kashmir were unparalleled and unheard of in the history of the world. He said that the Pan Islamic Fundamentalist forces brutally performed genocide by inflicting torture upon the displaced community's youth and children. On this occasion, a memorandum was passed under Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi's chairmanship and sent to the Chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission, Shri M.N. Venkatachallaiah. All the leaders of other organizations, including Panun Kashmir, signed this memorandum and said that the non-implementation of the National Human Rights Commission



recommendations is another example of humiliation to which the community is being subjected.

On 12 Nov 1996, Kashmiri Pandits urged the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to take 'full cognizance of their plight and initiate a *Suo Motu* inquiry into the killings of innocent people and the exodus of people from the valley.

The All-State Kashmiri Pandit Conference (ASKPC) and the Panun Kashmir Movement (PKM) - the two organizations representing nearly 300,000 Kashmiri refugees said in separate statements that the NHRC should 'rescue' the Kashmiri Pandits who have been living under threat and in miserable conditions for the past six years since their displacement from the valley in 1990. The ASKPC said the Pandits had not only been deprived of their political, social and ethical rights, but their liberties had also been encroached upon, and their right to live had been abrogated. In a memorandum to the NHRC Chairperson M.N. Venkatachallaiah, the Panun Kashmir Movement (PKM) urged the commission to consider fixing a time for the finalization of its findings and recommend measures to redress the wrong and humiliation suffered by the community.

Mr. Ashwani Kumar (PKM Convener), said in a statement here that the houses of about 200 Kashmiri refugees had been burnt in Kashmir even after the popular government took office in the state in October 1996. He alleged that about 100 prominent Kashmiri Pandits had been marked for being killed by Pakistan's inter-services intelligence (ISI). Reports in newspapers in Jammu had displayed about 100 prominent Kashmiri Pandits, including doctors, engineers and intellectuals, on the hit list of some Kashmiri militant organizations, at the behest of the ISI. The list, which was based on an official document, also included some women. He said that NHRC had recommended that the government provide some interim relief measures that have remained unimplemented to date. The non-implementation of the NHRC recommendations by the government is another example of the



humiliation to which the community is being subjected. He alleged that the government was using all methods to urge Kashmiri Pandits to return to the valley. He added that the community had lost about a thousand people and that thousands of houses in the valley had been desecrated.

### Content for Social Change or Service Activities

With growing acceptability and importance beyond traditional quarters, All-State Kashmiri Pandit Conference provided content for social change and service activities, which led to a series of mass movements and programmes to generate awareness about the general state of affairs about them and the callousness of the government towards them. This led to the awakening of the displaced lot, and they realized their role in the struggle to fight for their rights. In a series of such public meetings in Jammu in which prominent ASKPC members, namely O.N. Trisal, Kanya Lal, Moti Lal Malla, Pushkar Nath Tengloo, Omkar Nath, Madan Lal, Prithvi Nath, Shyam Lal, Ashok Dhar and Ram Krishan used to be present, the people were taken into confidence. The organisation introduced a case for serving the people to bring societal changes.

In a public gathering which was addressed by Shri Vaishnavi and Shri Hira Lal Chatta, the morale of the public was boosted to prepare them for the ongoing struggle for their rehabilitation and honourable settlement in a historic conference held at Kunjwani, Jammu. Pandit Vaishnavi deplored in solid terms the weak and faulty policies of the government, which had failed to seek the rehabilitation of the exiled community. Highlighting the problems of the Kashmiri Pandits in camps and non-camps, he cautioned the government to take serious note of their concern so as not to invite their wrath. Shri Hira Lal Chatta explained the hardships faced by the displaced people living in one-room tenements and said that the privacy of these people was severely eroded, crossing all limits of civility.



The government was silent over the killers of Shri Tika Lal Taploo, Shri Prem Nath Bhat, Shri Lassa Koul, Maulana Molvi Farooq, Maulana Masoodi, Mushir-ul-Haq, Mohammad Yousaf Halwai and Shri Neelkant Ganjoo and many other young and old from the Kashmiri Hindu community. It had overlooked all legal, constitutional, moral and human norms. He asked the government as to why the killers of these people were not punished, more so when Bitta Karate himself had publicly confessed to having killed more than 40 Kashmiri Pandits.

In a big congregation in Transport Nagar and Nagrota in Jammu, Pandit Vaishnavi and Mr Hira Lal made an open confession that tall promises made by the government to ban the fundamental institutions in the valley that were spreading venom against the minority community had not been fulfilled nor had any action been initiated in this direction till date. He said that the state administration had completely failed to arrest the lawlessness in the valley, which had taken a heavy toll on the innocent civilians and the dutiful security personnel in the state.

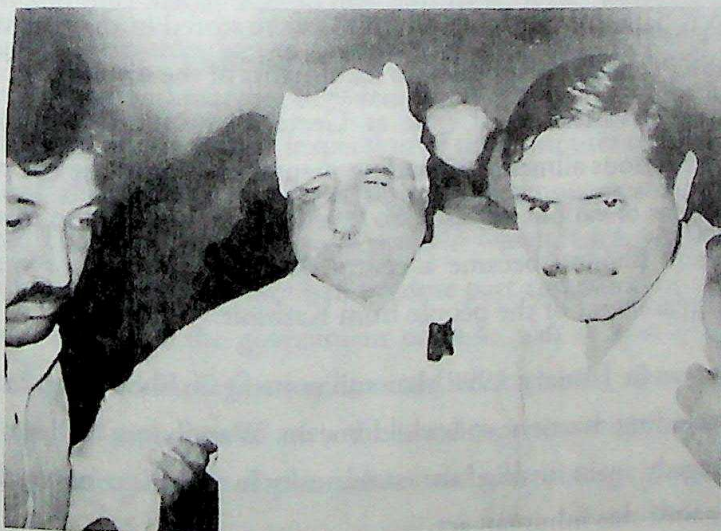
### Police Lathi Hits Vaishnavi - Protests Against Sangrampora Massacre

In March 1997, terrorists dragged seven Kashmiri Pandits from their houses at Sangrampora village in Kashmir and gunned them down. In this connection, there was a call from all the KP organizations to unite under one platform to express the communities' anger and pain over the killings. Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi called for a protest rally of the community to be held at Jammu while marching to the Civil Secretariat to submit a memorandum to the chief minister Dr Farooq Abdullah. During early 1997 when the Civil Secretariat was functional in Jammu, the winter capital of J&K, Pandit Radhakrishnan Raina, Shri Ashok Kumar Baroo and Shri Hira Lal Chatta, the three versatile leaders who were always at the beck and call of the Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, made tremendous efforts to arrange a big protest rally of the Kashmiri Pandits so that the call given by Pandit Vaishnavi to the community in exile, could be



implemented with full strength. It was on 21<sup>st</sup> March 1997 that 40000 displaced Kashmiri Pandits marched in a procession from Canal Road, raising slogans against the killings of Sangrampora in Kashmir. The procession was led by Pandit Vaishnavi, Dr. Agnishekhar, Shri Hira Lal Chatta, Shri Ashok Kumar Braroo, a renowned poet and writer, Shri Maharaj Krishan Santoshi, Shri Bal Krishan Seeru, Shri R K Raina and Smt. Shama Handoo. The procession was peaceful, and on reaching Indira Chowk, they were stopped by the police. People didn't stop their onward journey towards the Civil Secretariat. The police raised lathis, and the entire procession was lathi charged. Many people, including women and children, were injured. Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi's life was saved by Smt. Shama Handoo when she jumped over him to shield him from the lathis. However, Amarnath Vaishnavi's head was hit, and he fell on the road with blood oozing from his head, and his turban fell on the roadside. The eyewitnesses said that they were reminded of the great revolutionary Shri Lala Lajpat Rai, who was also hit by lathis when he was protesting against the Simon

Commission, which the British Government had sent in 1928 on a mission to India to suggest certain measures to bring some political reforms in the country. It was



then that Shri Lala Lajpat Rai attained martyrdom after falling on the road along with his turban after the lathis hit him. Dr Agnishekhar also received injuries on his head, and all the injured people were taken to the hospital for medical treatment.



Immediately thereafter, Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi took the initiative and arranged a delegation comprising Shri R.K. Raina, Shri Shailendra Aima, Dr. Ajay Chrangoo, Dr. Agnishekhar and Shri Ashok Braroo, who made an on-the-spot assessment of the events at Sangrampora. The delegation visited the places of killings and the places of worship of Hindus, which were burnt by the militants. This delegation then came up with the consolidated report to discuss it with the government.

The ASKPC also took the initiative to further their demand of providing security to those Kashmiri Pandits who continued to live in Kashmir for certain reasons. ASKPC and other groups led by the ASKPC who initiated all the relief measures for rehabilitating the displaced people in Jammu were working from Geeta Bhawan, located near Parade Ground. It served as the head office of Sanatan Dharam Sabha, Jammu. Geeta Bhawan had become the hub of all the activities required to console the people in trouble. Aid and assistance in various garbs and medicines coming from different quarters on a call given by J&K Sahayata Samiti and ASKPC were stored in the rooms of Geeta Bhawan. ASKPC had also appealed to the doctors of the displaced community to render their services free of cost at Geeta Bhawan. The displaced people faced tremendous ailments, including mental problems; the old people had been the victims of various diseases. So healthcare was needed to treat these people, and Geeta Bhawan became a centre of such activities for many years after the displacement of the people from Kashmir.

It was in January 1998 that militants again shot dead 23 Kashmiri Pandits, including women and children, in Wandhama Village in Kashmir. This tragedy again invoked the community in exile to come to the streets to protest against this inhuman act.

#### Amar Balidan Trust - Providing Further Aid to Pandits in Exile

In early 1997, ASKPC set up a trust known as "Amar Balidan Trust" to help the needy and the destitute from the community in trouble under the leadership of Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi. In due course of time, the trust was



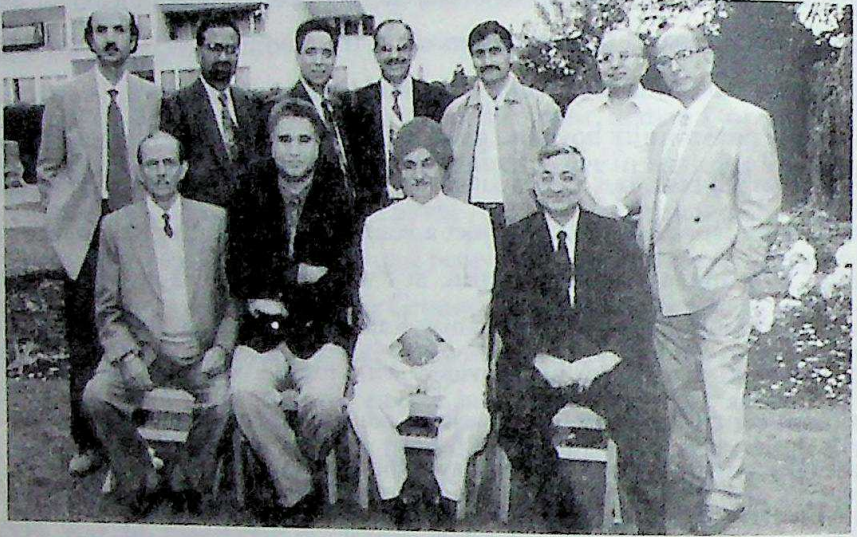
registered with the government as per the rules. A proper body was framed with Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi as its President, Shri Hira Lal Chatta as its Vice-President and Shri Moti Lal Malla as its General Secretary. This trust arranged collective Yagnopavit and collective marriages of deserving boys and girls of the community in turmoil. This trust also kept itself busy in helping the poor with cash and kind to see that no one in the displaced community suffered for want of such help. As part of the initiatives of the trust, both Shri Vaishnavi and Shri Radha Krishan Raina took pains to establish a computer centre in Jammu City so that the community boys and girls could be trained to use computers. It was quite an uphill task, but they managed it systematically and saw to it that their dream came true. Both of them met a young boy Shri Sanjay Kalloo who was already running a computer centre at the National Institute of Technical Training at Gandhi Nagar. Shri Sanjay Kalloo, in a meeting with them, agreed that the institute could be provided with more computers to make it a computer centre for community welfare. So, Shri Radha Krishan Raina, Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi and Shri Sanjay Kalloo met Shri M.K. Kaw, Secretary in the Ministry of Human Resources in the government of India. They had a thorough discussion. In a second meeting between Shri Vaishnavi and Shri M K Kaw, it was decided that after a proper inspection of the computer centre in Gandhi Nagar Jammu, the ministry could sanction some computers through its Directorate office. The said inspection took place in which it was verified that Shri Sanjay Kalloo's computer centre had become part and parcel of the Amar Balidan Trust. After that, the government of India sent at least 7-10 computers to the centre. Shri R K Ganjoo, a noted educationist, also met Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi and donated a few thousand rupees to the institute to facilitate computer training for the displaced boys and girls.

### Message to the World Community

In the summer of 1997, overseas Kashmiri Pandits organized a global Kashmiri Pandit conference in London. The conference was attended by Kashmiri Pandits from all over the world. Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, Dr Kundan Lal Choudhary, Pandit T.N. Khera and Shri Ashwani Chhangoo attended the said



conference. Shri Chaman Lal Gaddoo from Delhi represented Kashmiri Pandits in Delhi in this conclave. After two days of deliberations, this conclave took many important decisions for the welfare of the displaced people from Kashmir. In this conclave, a Global Political steering committee of Kashmiri Pandits was formed.



Dr. K.L Chowdhary, T N Khosa, Ashwani Chhangoo, C L Gaddoo, Amarnath Vaishnavi & others

Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi was elected its chairman. Pandit T.N. Khosa was elected as Director – Religious & Cultural Affairs. Dr K.L. Choudhary was elected as the Director - Political Affairs. Mr. Ashwani Chhangoo was elected as the Director – Human Rights. At the end of the deliberations, Shri Vaishnavi addressed a press conference in London wherein he stated in clear terms that the Kashmiri Pandits had come to this place to make the Western people and the Europeans aware of the fact that there was no fight for liberation in Kashmir. The Kashmiris of all faiths were free to adhere to their faiths and enjoy their rights freely. Therefore, it was a move from Pakistan and other Muslim countries to thrust upon Kashmiris the concept of fundamentalism and create conditions to Islamize India and the rest of the world. He said, “We,



the Hindus of Kashmir, have suffered a lot, and the militants there have crossed all the limits of Human Rights violations. So, what had happened in Kashmir was a signal for the Islamization of the globe, which was the target of the fundamentalists the world over". Unfortunately, the said steering community lasted only for three years, with its head office in Jammu.

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), a body working under the purview of the government of India, started conducting meetings through a high-power committee since the year 1998 to assess and monitor the overall functioning of the governmental bodies working in different directions to improve the living conditions of the refugees from Kashmir. Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, Shri Hira Lal Chatta and all other Kashmiri Pandit organizational heads, including Dr. R L Bhat from J&K Vichar Manch, were its members. Amarnath Vaishnavi was keen enough to monitor the forming of the agenda for high-power committees, which were held under the control of the J&K government. He would see to it that the matter for discussion was genuine and that the decisions taken in these meetings were implemented.

### Connecting the Dots of the Multiple Struggling Movements

It was now that almost all the major Kashmiri Pandit organizations, without deviating from the programs and policies of their respective units, woke up to the inner call of their conscience to fight the battle for the community's survival. These organizations, in due course of time, adopted unanimity in respect of various issues concerning the community in exile. These issues included the demand for initiating an enquiry to know the reasons for the mass exodus and to bring to book the culprits by fixing the responsibilities of such a horror. It also included a demand to initiate proceedings against the killers of innocent Hindus in Kashmir. All these organizations were unanimous in demanding refugee status for the displaced Kashmiri Pandits treating them as per the rules of the UN charter.



These organizations, including ASKPC, equally focused on the falsehood propagated by the forces in and outside the country, who, in the name of human rights activities, were engaged in maligning Indian security forces and Shri Jagmohan, who was then governor of the state and was held responsible for the widespread violence and the terror unleashed by the militants in the J & K state. Almost all the Pandit organizations sought the help of print media, addressed the press conferences, and held protest rallies either individually or collectively to expose those forces bent on shielding and covering up the PoK-sponsored terrorism in Kashmir and other parts of the country. ASKPC, headed by Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi and the other organizations which continued to lead the community in trouble were Kashmiri Pandit Sabha Jammu, the three factions of Panun Kashmir, Kashmiri Samiti Delhi, All India Kashmiri Samaj Delhi, Jammu Kashmir Vichar Manch, Roots in Kashmir and also All India Kashmiri Pandit Conference, headed by Shri Hriday Nath Jattu, Hindu Mahasabha J&K, headed by its lone member Shri Pushkar Nath Kaul (Vakeel) and Kashmiri Pandit conference Delhi headed by Shri Kundan Kashmiri. The personalities like Agnishekhar, Dr Chrangoo, Dr Shakti Bhan, Shri O.N. Trisal, Shri Ashwani Chrangoo, all from Panun Kashmir, Aditya Raj Kaul of roots in Kashmir and many other intellectuals of the KP organizations got engaged in Panel discussions with the Kashmiri separatist leaders and expressed their viewpoints loud and clear. Amarnath Vaishnavi, with all his humility, holding the cause of the Hindu refugees of the state as supreme and close to his heart, always attended the meetings called by the allied organizations of the Kashmiri Pandits whenever and wherever these were held. He had close interactions with the leading organizational heads and social activists, including Shri J N Kaul, Shri M K Kaw, Shri Moti Kaul, and Dr. Romesh Raina, all from All India Kashmiri Samaj, Smt. Kaushalya Wali and Shri T N Khosa from Kashmiri Pandit Sabha Jammu; Shri T.N. Razdan, Dr R.L. Bhat from J&K Vichar Manch, Shri H.N. Nehru, Dr. L N Dhar, Shri Sunil Shakhddhar and Shri Chaman Lal Gadoo from Kashmir Samiti Delhi and many other stalwarts who mattered for the community in distress.





With Dr. Agnishekhar, T N Khosa & Ajay Chrangoo

Pandit Amarnath was a calm person and always had a smile on his face despite commotion and problems. He, however, could not control his anger at times as he was holding inside him the pain of the sufferings of his community. His anger would make him a revolutionary to compel the authorities to agree to his terms regarding the settlement of issues. He also stayed connected with the heads of all Kashmiri Pandit organizations in all parts of India to be in touch with the latest developments in the community. Some people might say that Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi was the only messiah of the Pandit community, and there is a common consensus among people that he was the one whose voice mattered the most in the time of gloom. Community's remarks have always added to his stature. He would always be on his toes to help the members of the community out of their distress. He would never take rest.

In his public address in 1998, Pandit Amarnath stated that the government had not sincerely tried to rehabilitate the Pandit community. Therefore, he demanded that the government work towards carving out a security zone in the valley for the settlement of Kashmiri Pandits.



## Narratives Justifying Struggle

The bomb that exploded within the boundaries of Jammu city in October 1992 changed the entire narrative of the sympathy that the Jammuities had in favour of the displaced Kashmiri Hindus since 1990. Two young Kashmiri Pandit boys aged eighteen to twenty years, Sunil Koul and Sumesh Bhan, thought the elderly were under undeserved stress due to the exodus as they had to live in tents and Dharamshalas after their displacement. They helped people in whichever way possible, but they also became revengeful. They actively worked on building a team of revolutionaries and decided to take up arms against the militants.

They carried a bomb to Shri Ranbir Model Higher Secondary School, designated as an examination centre for Kashmiri militants who were jailed in Court Balwal Jammu. They went there with the intention of bombing these militants, however, the bomb exploded in their hands while they were trying to search the room where militants were writing their exam because the regular classes of local Jammu students were also running simultaneously. In the accident, Sunil Koul lost his life, whereas Sumesh Bhan lost one hand. This incident led to a rumour that the attack was intended against the local Jammu students. As a sharp reaction to the incident, there was propaganda that the assault was against the local inhabitants of Jammu. The 'Hate Kashmiri Pandit' campaign gained momentum, and Kashmiri Pandits were abused and insulted by the locals, and the Pandit women were called unpleasant names, and abusive remarks were made against them. This could have created a conflict between the Dogras of Jammu and the Pandits living there.

ASKPC looked upon this as a matter which could have serious repercussions in the coming days, even to the extent of a blood bath which could have seriously disrupted the peace in the region. Shri Hiralal Chatta convened an emergency meeting which was presided by Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi. In the meeting, it was decided that they would reach out to the people of the Jammu region with support from RSS and subsequently counter the hate campaign



that had just started. They, along with RSS functionaries, went door to door and explained the truth about the incident to the residents. They clarified that the attack was meant to be on the terrorists inside the school where the bomb had exploded and that it was not targeted at the locals of Jammu. The members of both organizations distributed pamphlets in which they hailed Sunil Koul's martyrdom and Sumesh Bhan's bravery. This effort bore fruit and helped obliterate the erstwhile hatred and changed the mindset of the local people of Jammu. To everyone's surprise, ten thousand people from all walks of life attended the tenth-day ritual after the martyrdom of Sunil Koul at Tawi River in Jammu. People raised the slogan, "Sunil Koul Amar Rahe." Sumesh Bhan remained in jail for a few years, and after his release, he was a changed man who never spoke again. He passed away on February 5, 2021, in New Delhi due to multiple ailments and left behind a heartbroken family.

Kashmiri Pandit community continues to live in exile, and the memory of its martyrs like Sunil Koul and Sumesh Bhan and various other people, which includes women and children who were killed by terrorists, continues to haunt them. Even after thirty-one years, no one is answerable for the genocide of this minuscule community. The political hierarchy has been completely ineffective in its efforts to grant Kashmiri Pandits a homeland where they all can live again as a community and nurture their heritage. Many voices have risen from amongst the Pandit community clamouring for a homeland, and one similar voice of Mr. Sushil Pandit, a social activist and the founder of Hive Communication Pvt. Ltd was heard in an interview with a news channel in New Delhi in February 2021. Mr. Pandit said, "In recent years, I have travelled across India, visited many places, and tried to create awareness about the forced exodus of Kashmiri Pandits. I met several politicians and bureaucrats who govern our country. I tried to explain to them the problems which the Pandit community has been facing for the last thirty-one years. Still, I was pained to hear from them that we should stop talking about our pain because it creates obstacles in their way to create goodwill amongst the Muslims of Kashmir to win their hearts. So, we are now caught between the two parts of a flour



grinder, getting crushed between the Jihadis who killed us and rendered us homeless and the political hierarchy, which silences us and bothers little about the sufferings this genocide has caused us. I must say that it is a denial of the genocide, and the denial is worse than the genocide itself. It is impossible for us to forget the annihilation of the Hindus of Kashmir by Jihadis, to which we are a living witness. We have seen the killings of our women and children mercilessly; how is it possible to just ignore and move on? We would do great injustice to our martyrs and ourselves by remaining silent. We oppose those people who criticize the security forces in Kashmir because they are the people who are not only fighting the jihadis but also providing relief to the local Muslims in times of floods and other natural calamities. The attitude of our political bigwigs can turn out to be lethal for our country. In the past, we have seen our country facing dangers from outside, but now we have Kashmir, where the enemy is inside; tomorrow, it can be Bengal or Assam or Kerala. My country men should be aware of this so they do not feel guilty of being ignorant in the face of the dangers ahead.”

### The Relentless Mass Movement of Amar Nath Sangharsh Samiti

Shri Amarnath Shrine Board was constituted in the late 1990s and is comprised of ten members, with the Governor as its Chairman after the J&K state government passed the Shrine Board Act in the state legislature. It requested the state government in 2002 to allot 800 kanals of land for the convenience of the visiting devotees. The state chief minister Shri Mufti Mohammad Sayed, opposed the proposal by raising issues like pollution and demographic imbalance. Not only was this proposal opposed, but the state government's proposal of extending the yatra period from one month to two months was also opposed.

However, the Board requested the government again in 2007 for temporary allotment of land at Baltal to set up makeshift facilities for proper stay arrangements and convenience of the devotees. In May 2008, the State



Government placed a proposal before the ministerial meeting, which was attended by the congress PDP Alliance. Later, the state government passed orders for allotment of 800 kanals of land in Baltal to the Shrine board with the condition that the Shrine board shall use the land temporarily for two months at a rental amount of two crores thirty-one lakh thirty thousand and four hundred rupees. It was also stated that the Shrine Board shall return the land to the tourism department. The Shrine Board was not to erect or construct any permanent structure on the land, and the land was to provide facilities to the pilgrims and not for any other purpose whatsoever. As per the condition, the Shrine Board was also to pay a compensation of Rs 19, 94,000 per year. However, the Shrine Board accepted the above terms and conditions in May 2008. Thus, orders were issued by the Government wherein nine hectares of land and 30.88 hectares were allotted for the construction of a camp at Baltal. In the document, the word 'diversion' was used instead of 'transfer'. After the allotment of land by the government, the construction of temporary structures got underway, which gave people all over the country a cause for cheer and rejoicing. Separatist organizations like the Hurriyat Conference could not digest this view. All the separatist organizations raised a hue and cry against this order, and the entire atmosphere was vitiated with anti-Shri Amarnath Shrine Board stances. The People's Democratic Party of Mufti Mohammad Syed, Shri Muzaffar Beg, who was the deputy chief minister and others in the party, along with National Conference and Congress leaders of Jammu & Kashmir state, openly advocated that the land be taken back from the Shrine Board. The coalition government of Congress and PDP bowed down before the separatists, and the newly appointed governor Shri N.N Vohra, who replaced General S. K. Sinha after his retirement, also supported this anti-India mission. He issued a letter to Shri Ghulam Nabi Azad, the state's chief minister, asking whether the government could make arrangements for the Amarnath pilgrimage. The chief minister promptly responded to the governor and, in haste, issued a letter to him without consulting the Shrine Board in which he stated that the Shri Amarnath shrine board did not have the requisite resources and was unable to make proper arrangements for the Amarnath Yatra on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2008.



Muzaffar Beg and Omar Abdullah announced that the land issue would meet its end soon. The Chief Minister also announced simultaneously that the land at Baltal was not required and that the Government was capable of managing the Yatra efficiently. Thus, the land was withdrawn quickly after the cabinet passed a resolution to this effect. This happened when the government was in the minority because of the withdrawal of support by the PDP. This was also an unconstitutional decision of the governor under clause-16 of the Shrine Board Act. It was quite clear that the mechanism of control and management of yatra entrusted to the Shrine Board could not be taken over by the state authority or any other party under clause 16 of the Shrine Board Act. Hindus of the state felt humiliated by the authority of the state, which had played with the religious sentiments of the crores of devotees of Lord Shiva. People in Jammu came to the streets expressing their anger and anguish on the issue. Given the unrest among people, leaders of various Hindu organizations of Jammu, including Jammu-based Kashmiri Hindu organizations like the All State Kashmiri Pandit Conference and Jammu & Kashmir Vichar Manch, came together to deliberate on the issue of channelizing this wave of nationalism and Hindu faith into an organized movement and therefore a well-organized meeting was held in Jammu. Those who participated in the meeting were Dr Ramakant Dube, President V.H.P J&K, Brigadier Suchet Singh, who was the Sangh Chalak Jammu, advocate Tilak Raj Sharma (RSS), Shri Dinesh Khanna, convener of Dharam Jagran coordination department, Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi and Dr R.L. Bhat of J&K Vichar Manch. There was a detailed discussion on the formation of the Shri Amarnath Yatra Sangharsh Samiti, and after the discussion ended, the Sangharsh Samiti came into existence. Advocate Leela Karan Sharma was chosen as its president, and in its first meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2008, the following four resolutions were passed.

- 1 To make an appeal to the Central Government, the President of India and Governor N.N. Vohra.



2. Appeal for the arrest and trial of separatist leaders like Ali Shah Geelani, Mirwaiz Omar Farooq and others who issued anti-India statements under the applicable laws.

3. Appeal to the Hon'ble President to order the governor and Home Minister of state to restore the land to the Shrine Board and withdraw the subsidy and land given to Pampore Islamic University, Jammu Haj House and Badshah Ghulam Shah University.

4. Appeal to the Hindu organizations, saint's seers and Shankracharyas of the country to come out of their huts and lead the holy struggle against the unjust, unfair and anti-national decision of the Government of J&K throughout the country.

The core group of the Amar Nath Yatra Sangharsh Samiti, with advocate Leela Karan as its head, consisted of 34 members, including two Kashmiri Pandit leaders, namely Shri R.L. Bhat of Kashmiri intellectual forum and Shri Hira Lal Bhat of J&K Vichar Manch. An advisory body of ten members was also constituted to guide the Sangharsh Samiti to make its movement strong and meaningful. Some elders of leading organizations, including Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi of ASKPC, were its members. In response to the call given by the Samiti, the entire Jammu region remained closed for ten days, and a large number of demonstrations, processions and public meetings were held. The hard handling of the police aggravated the situation. The entire Hindu Samaj, accompanying old and young men and women, took part in the struggle. On the 8<sup>th</sup> day of the struggle, a procession of elders led by Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi marched through the old city of Jammu, and Pandit Vaishnavi addressed a huge gathering of people. In his address, he openly challenged the policies of the Congress, National Conference and the PDP combine by blaming them for their communal bias against Hindus. He said that the tune of Kashmiriat harped by these pseudo-secularists had lost its taste completely since Kashmir was put to flames and the holy places of Hindus in Kashmir had been attacked and desecrated. He said the extremists and hardliners of the



Kashmir valley had an eye on the various religious boards of Hindus, and from the very beginning, the successive governments of J&K as well as the central Government, had pursued a policy that played with the sentiments of lakhs of Hindus from time to time. He appealed to the people to act to reach a meaningful goal. He also criticized the police for their brutal actions. The movement, however, took many lives, and hundreds got injured and were admitted to hospitals. On 7<sup>th</sup> July 2008, the state Government under Shri Ghulam Nabi Azad resigned. A massive dharna led by Sangharsh Samiti took place on 9<sup>th</sup> July 2008 at 11 am, which was attended by 5000 workers of various Hindu organizations. The Dharna was addressed by the leading organizational heads. Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, while speaking on this occasion, boosted the morale of the youngsters by saying that their struggle has overthrown the Government. He said that their pious intentions would soon end the draconian order of the Government. On 14<sup>th</sup> July, the governor faced a large number of protestors in Jammu carrying black flags, and on 18<sup>th</sup> July 2008, there was a complete strike in the whole of Jammu region. The police brutality increased public unrest at around two dozen places on the outskirts of Jammu. People swam across the Tawi River to reach their destinations. People were forcibly prevented from making their forward march. At various places of Jammu region viz. Samba, Kathua, Udhampur, Rajouri, Poonch and Doda police used force needlessly and did not allow people to assemble. More and more people got injured in lathi-charge and teargas operations. Instead of taking the injured to the hospital, they were bundled into the crèches and taken either to the police station or prison. Curfew and police failed to dampen the spirit and suppress the love and dedication of the people towards their cause.

In a public meeting held by ASKPC at Geeta Bhawan in Jammu on 13<sup>th</sup> July 2008, observing black day, a galaxy of Kashmiri Pandit leaders, while paying tribute to the martyrs of Kashmir, who were the victims of terrorism, also paid their homage to the martyrs, who were killed in the present struggle of Sangharsh Samiti in Jammu. The gathering was addressed, among others, by



Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, Pandit Radha Krishan Raina and Shri Hira Lal Chatta.

In a speech by Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, he gave an open call to the Kashmiri Pandits residing in Jammu to continue their participation in the Amarnath Sangharsh Samiti movement with more vigour and a sense of dedication. He hailed their role in the present movement and said that the present battle was part of the Battle that the Kashmiri Hindus had started as early as 1990. The battle was for the survival of the patriots and their cultural heritage in J&K.

The entire Hindu Samaj of the state of Jammu and Kashmir had ultimately fought relentlessly for 63 days to release the land in Kashmir for the convenience of Shri Amarnath Pilgrims. The loss in Jammu was estimated to be about Rs 26,775/-crore. But after all the hardships and sacrifices, Hindu unity emerged triumphantly. After a series of meetings between the Government and the Sangharsh Samiti, the two sides finally came together, and a historic agreement was signed on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2008. The agreement said that the State Government shall provide 800 kanals of land in Baltal for the annual Shri Amarnath Yatra, which would be solely used by Shri Amarnath Shrine Board, and there would be no change in the status and title of ownership of the land.

#### Historic ASKPC Conference: Jammu

A two-day conference of All State Kashmiri Pandit Conference Sheetal Nath was held in Jammu on the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> of April, 2010 at Geeta Bhawan, and it was said that the rights of the Kashmiri Hindus were ignored by the Government and also by the Human Rights organisations, therefore a clear-cut policy on Kashmir was needed to address the Kashmir problem. The resolution passed in the conference was summed up in a memorandum signed by ASKPC president Pandit Vaishnavi and sent to the Prime Minister of India.



Its copies were circulated among human rights activists and the opposition parties in India. The resolution read: "Instead of countering separatism in Kashmir, the policies of the Government have only boosted the morale of the separatists. The governments, from time to time, both at the centre and in the state, have so far adopted the policies of winning the hearts of the people of Kashmir, as they have expressed occasionally. But it must be noted that the Governments have failed in their mission miserably. A policy promoting national interest needs to be brought in keeping in view that the governments of the day and the people of the state are facing Jihadis. The minorities of the state who are non-Muslims are watching their doom helplessly. The political parties of all colours running the governments have been adopting appeasement policies. The genocide of Hindus in the state, particularly in the valley, has resulted from radicalisation. The ruling parties and the opposition parties must try to understand that radicalisation needs to be addressed in the state. The attempt to secularise radical minds is futile because radicalisation and secularisation cannot move together. Human rights activists and the governments have not virtually been keen to take note of terrorism which the peace-loving citizens of the state have faced. There is no doubt that the economic packages for the sufferers of Kashmir were announced on various occasions, but what remains to be done is to think of the permanent settlement of displaced Kashmiri Hindus who have lost their identity in the mess created around them by the Jihadis. The need of the hour is that the adjustment of the employees who come under the Prime Minister's Package Formula be brought to Jammu province immediately, taking into account their safety and security. What else remains to be attended to is saving Hindu temples and shrines in Kashmir. Most of the religious places of Hindus in Kashmir are in bad shape. Offerings to the Hindu shrines in Kashmir are not properly accounted for, and what is required is to have a lawfully made management body to look after these shrines and temples. This demand has not been responded to by the concerned quarters, and the passage of the Shrines and Temples Bill is still pending in the state legislature.



Therefore, we demand a serious look at the points raised by this conference so that the beginning is made with proper handling of terrorism and problems connected with terrorism in the State of Jammu and Kashmir.”

While addressing the gathering at the conference, the President of ASKPC, Pandit Vaishnavi, in his loud and clear voice, asked his people to be prepared to face the challenge and to raise their voices to reach the rest of the Indians and the people around the world. He said the reason for such an action is that our voice, which is the victim of genocide, is nowhere counted globally. He said the challenge is to find a root around the obstacles that are laid in our way. It is no longer about yes or no to talks and engagements but about working around different interest groups with different strategies, which will remain a part of this process. What else remains to be attended to is to save Hindu temples and shrines in Kashmir from desecration and destruction.

### Demand for Temples and Shrines Bill

Pandit Vaishnavi was the ardent supporter of the Pandit Prem Nath Bhat Memorial Trust headed by his son Shri Kashmiri Lal. The trust was struggling to have a law passed in the state legislature to protect the temples and shrines. In Kashmir in the year 2010, when Prem Nath Bhat Memorial Trust called for wider participation of Hindus of Jammu & Kashmir, particularly the Kashmiri Hindus, in the long-drawn struggle to safeguard Hindu temples and shrines in Kashmir and arranged seminars to awaken the people to come forward for this noble cause. Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi made his stand clear. He said that after the exodus of the Kashmiri Hindus from Kashmir from 1989 onwards, the local people in Kashmir were hostile to the Hindus of Kashmir for their pro-India stance. The fundamentalists encroached upon their places of worship and destroyed Hindu temples, shrines, and homes, ending Kashmir's age-old culture. There appeared to be no safeguard to protect these places from attacks which took place time and again. He said Hindu temples and shrines in Kashmir were the symbols of faith of Hindus of Jammu & Kashmir and the



rest of India and have immense heritage value. Some temples and shrines in Kashmir have a vast chunk of land which needs to be protected along with the temples and shrines per se. So, keeping all these factors in view, it could have been a confidence-building measure if a bill to protect Hindu temples and shrines in Kashmir, which was introduced by the National Conference government in the 2009 budget session, could have been passed in the state assembly. So, it was the need of the hour to come up with the proposed legislation. He said that the law should come in such a form that every religious place of Hindus in Kashmir gets protection under the provision of the law. The meeting passed a resolution demanding that the government takes immediate steps in the right direction.



## Chapter—8

### Carrying Forward the Grandeur

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It is generally believed that the men and women of eminence who are benevolent and tolerant possess the courage to bear the heat and the cold, the light and the darkness, that envelop our lives from time to time. Great men are the peacemakers who create love and remove hatred to save humanity from cruelty and bloodshed. These legendary personalities toil in uncertain weather where the foul smell and uncertainty bloom due to the brutal and nasty behaviour of the enemies of peace. Peace lovers bring confidence back to those whose faith is shaken due to the acts of Barbarism. Men and women with humility, while serving mankind in distress, have no ill will, no grievances and no repentances, especially when working for those in trouble; they are selfless. This also describes Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, a well-known social activist and a leader of repute who had practically assumed the role of caretaker and saviour of the refugees of Kashmir since 1990. For decades he was on the go, always seen reaching out either to the people to offer help or to various departments of the Government to resolve the cases related to the displaced community, such as cash relief, pension, and compensation for the burnt houses of the refugees etc. He would either be seen walking to his destination on foot or availing the overcrowded public transport; he would even travel standing in the matadors of Jammu.

His old age never kept him away from his mission. He would rather say that he felt younger when he worked for the people. Even when he crossed the 80<sup>th</sup> year of his age, he was seen walking uphill to reach the Townhall of Jammu to



meet the chairman of the J&K Bank. The reason why he was meeting him was to request him to cancel the transfer order of an employee to Chennai since that person had an ailing mother, and it would have been impossible for her to shift her base. Pandit Vaishnavi was also instrumental in getting this same person appointed in the J & K Bank only two years back because of his poverty. Pandit Vaishnavi accompanied the boys and girls in exile several times to get them admitted to various educational institutions all over India, where he and his team had convinced the authorities to add seats for migrant students. Pandit Jagan Nath Koul and Shri Kidar Nath Sahani along with him, would make joint efforts to get the Kashmiri Hindu boys and girls appointed in some private companies. Pandit Vaishnavi had high regard for Shri Jagan Nath Koul, Dwarka Nath Munshi, and Shri Moti Koul, who were heading the organization known by the name "All India Kashmiri Samaj" and were serving the Kashmiri Pandit community in exile. Mr. Jagan Nath Koul is a fascinating personality who, while heading the S.O.S Village fraternity, made it a point to give solace to the affected community by helping whichever way possible. He also arranged computer training for boys and girls of the Kashmiri Hindu community to prepare them for jobs. Pandit Jagan Nath Koul was instrumental in creating housing societies in Faridabad, Haryana, to enable the community in exile to have their dwellings there. Pandit Vaishnavi always emphasized the need to follow the principle of three S, "Service, Sacrifice & Self Discipline". He, through his speeches, motivated the younger generation to remove all those hurdles that kept them away from their cultural heritage. He continued to say that youngsters should follow the path of sacrifice to build and save national pride and should devote themselves to the service of mankind and possess self-discipline. He believed that people must remember the icons of the Hindu society who reformed society from within and built our national image. He hailed the role of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, Swami Dayanand Saraswati and Mahadev Govind Ranade, who worked for the abolition of Sati Pratha and child marriage and widow remarriage. He had praises for Shri Eknath Ranade, whom he considered to be the image builder



of India, for he came forward for the construction of the Swami Vivekananda Memorial Rock in Kanya Kumari.

On 19<sup>th</sup> Jan 2000, a decade after the exodus of the Hindus from Kashmir, the leading Kashmiri Pandit Organizations, namely All State Kashmiri Pandit Conference (ASKPC), Kashmiri Pandit Sabha Jammu, Panun Kashmir, Kashmir Samiti Delhi and All India Kashmiri Samaj New Delhi, while addressing the displaced community at various places highlighted the horrifying events that marred humanity in the J&K state. Since 1990, ASKPC mainly dealt with the challenges that the Pandit community faced during the decades of exile with Pandit Vaishnavi as the head of the organization. He spoke in a press conference in Delhi in the year 2000 in detail as to how the displaced teachers from Kashmir collaborated with the ASKPC leadership to make it possible to establish a camp office of Kashmir University and also the camp colleges for displaced Kashmiri students in Jammu. He mentioned the role of Professor B.L. Zutshi, who, along with ASKPC representative Mr. V.K. Kashkari, managed to unite the displaced teachers and students from the valley to fight for this noble cause. Pandit Vaishnavi also recalled the hardships the displaced private sector employees and business class faced and said that the challenge was accepted by the ASKPC gracefully. He also commended the role of Pandit Hriday Nath Jattoo, a renowned social activist and the president of the All India Kashmiri Pandit Conference, who, along with Pushkar Nath Tengloo of ASKPC, carried forward the struggle of the business class.

Pandit Vaishnavi was a social activist with the courage of a soldier. He worked as an RSS volunteer (Pracharak) in the remote villages of north Kashmir when he was posted in Handwara and Sogam areas. He used to travel from his place of posting on all Sundays and holidays to the remote areas to mix with the local youth who were later trained under his and Pandit Amar Nath Ganjoo's guidance to be always alert to anticipate the dangers which had the potential to destroy the communal harmony in Kashmir since Kashmir was always on the boil since independence. Pandit Vaishnavi had seen Shri M.S. Golwalkar (Shri Guru Ji) closely during the three decades from 1947 and would narrate



in detail some episodes of his life, throwing ample light on his constructive working and organizing acumen in the RSS Shakhas to attract the younger Swayam Sevaks. He had stood close to Shri Guru Ji in 1947 at DAV college in Srinagar and spoke to him face to face when he had come to meet Maharaja Hari Singh to prepare him for the accord of J&K state with India. After visiting the shakhas in the entire Kashmir, Shri Indresh Kumarji, who was the provincial Prant Pracharak of the Sangh for Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir, was impressed by the work done by the karyakartas of J&K. He had expressed satisfaction over the working of the Sangh in Kashmir. He had then insisted that the organizational karyakartas follow the footsteps of the karyakartas in Kashmir who worked under challenging circumstances. These remarks of Shri Indresh Kumar Ji could be treated as compliments to Shri Amar Nath Ganjoo, Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, Shri Moti Lal Malla, Shri Tika Lal Taploo, Shri Prem Nath Bhat and others who were working as part of the RSS in Kashmir. Pandit Vaishnavi was a stalwart among the dedicated and energetic swayamsevaks who contributed a lot to save the ethos of Kashmir right since 1947. Pandit Vaishnavi had mastered the art of connecting & being friends with people across cultures, and he could build organizations to serve mankind from scratch. I recall an event in the year 2006 when a large gathering of RSS Swayamsevaks and BJP leaders had assembled at the famous parade ground in Jammu to hear the RSS Chief. I saw a young man standing up from his chair when he saw Pandit Vaishnavi occupying one of the chairs in a different row. He walked up to Pandit Vaishnavi and bowed before him to touch his feet. The humble young man told Pandit Vaishnavi, "I am Mohan Lal Sharma, presently a minister in the Akali Dal, BJP Government in Punjab. I was brought to RSS Shakha and subsequently groomed by you in Pathankot. Sir, you are my Guru." Pandit Vaishnavi recognized him and then hugged him at once. The RSS Prant pracharak Shri Indresh Kumar asked Shri Mohan Lal Sharma when he returned to his chair as to how he knew Pandit Vaishnavi, and then Shri Mohan Lal told him that he was groomed by him to become a karyakarta in the Sangh. Pandit Vaishnavi worked in Punjab from 1949 to 1954.



The Sangha karyakartas were groomed by him right from 1947 to 1988. He was a lighthouse for the entire younger generation. While being groomed as Pracharaks, Swayamsevaks were engaged in social service. He attracted, influenced and motivated the youth to take service as their mission. He always reminded the audience of the services of a renowned Kashmiri Pandit Hakeem of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, whose name was Shriya Bhatt. Shriya Bhatt treated the ailing king of Kashmir, Sultan Zainulabddin, called Badshah, who was a merciful king. After getting relief from his ailment, Badshah told Shriya Bhatt to ask for a reward because he had treated him and saved his life. In his reply, Shriya Bhatt had asked for the return of those Kashmiri Pandits to the valley who had been forced to leave Kashmir valley in the previous years due to the King Sultan But Shikan who was intolerant towards idols and the idol worshippers. Badshah, the merciful king, ordered the return of those Kashmiri Pandits to the valley. This move of Badshah helped Kashmiri Pandits in exile to return to the valley honourably. Pandit Vaishnavi called Shriya Bhatt a protector of Dharma. He also recalled the services of Pandit Har Gopal Koul, Pandit Kashyap Bandu, Pandit Shiv Narayan Fotedar, Dr Shamboo Nath Peshin and Pandit Jia Lal Kilam and many other renowned Kashmiri Pandit leaders who raised their voices for Kashmiri Hindus on various occasions to seek justice for the community living as a microscopic minority in Kashmir. These leaders were also responsible for reforming the Kashmiri Hindu Samaj from time to time. Pandit Shreedharju Dullu is one such personality among the Kashmiri Pandits who reformed the Buddhist society in Leh, Ladakh, during his tenure as a teacher in the early 1950s.

### Inspiring Youth to Connect with the Legacy of Leaders

The youth who had assembled in large numbers to listen to their affectionate leader on the eve of Shivratri in the year 2000 in Geeta Bhawan near the parade ground in Jammu listened to him patiently. In his address, Pandit Vaishnavi recalled Swami Vivekananda for his contribution to building modern India.



He said, "We, the Indians owe everything to Swami Vivekananda; it may be his faith, his courage and his wisdom that inspires us from time to time. Vivekananda toured the whole of America to spread the knowledge of Vedanta and Bhartiya Culture." Then he named the men of eminence from J & K and other parts of the country who safeguarded the interests of India in Kashmir. The personalities whom he mentioned were Pandit Prem Nath Dogra from Jammu, Professor Balraj Madhok, Dr Shama Prasad Mukherji and Shri Kidar Nath Sahani. Prem Nath Dogra was the Sangh Chalak in the J&K state in the late 1940s and played a crucial role in establishing and consolidating the Sangh in Jammu. He said that Professor Balraj Madhok was a history professor at D.A.V College Srinagar and that he was instrumental in the expansion of Sangh in the valley with the help of Pandit Makhan Lal Aima, Pandit Omkar Nath Kak and Pandit Janki Nath Koul (Dhobi). He said that Pandit Makhan Lal Aima, in his teens in the mid-1940s, dared to challenge Sheikh Mohammad Abdulla for his pro-independence stance in Jammu & Kashmir and addressed several meetings of Swayam Sevaks of RSS in Srinagar and Jammu continuously despite the restrictions imposed on him by the Sheikh Abdullah government.



Pandit Makhan Lal Aima was arrested several times and was once imprisoned and kept in a jail in a deserted fort situated in the Peer Panchal range of Jammu & Kashmir called Gajpat Quila.

About Shri Kidar Nath Sahani, Pandit Vaishnavi said that Shri Sahani, along with Shri Jagdish Abrol, took over as the Pracharks of RSS in Jammu & Kashmir in the hour of crisis when the Sangh mobilized the people of Jammu and formed Praja Parishad, a



leading political outfit in Jammu which launched the historical movement from 1949 to 1953. Fifteen people lost their lives in the agitation. The movement, however, gained momentum and the all-India Jan Sangh with Dr Shyama Prasad Mukherjee as its president, converted the movement into an all-India agitation to fight against the separation of J&K State from the rest of the country. Dr Shyama Prasad Mukherjee also attained his martyrdom in Kashmir after he passed away there under mysterious circumstances. This agitation compelled Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah to make such statements which indicated that he wanted Kashmir to be set free with the help of America, and he was thus removed from power. Pandit Vaishnavi lauded the role of Shri Kidar Nath Sahani from 1989 onwards when he remained closely connected with Pandit Vaishnavi and with Shri Jagmohan, then governor of the J&K State.

While talking about the Vivekananda society, he said that from 1962 onwards, it inculcated a feeling of fellowship among the members of the society. He said he, along with Pandit Amar Nath Ganjoo and Pandit Prem Nath Bhat, Shri Hira Lal Chatta, Shri Pushkar Nath Karneil, Shri Madan Lal Khasho, Moti Lal Malla and Shri Hriday Nath Bhat, and with young blood of the society, moved from village to village in the valley on foot in all the districts of Kashmir as missionaries to involve the society in the service of mankind. He said that it was their mission to work among the masses to console them and develop in them their lost confidence due to arson, chaos and confusion created by the goons from time to time. At the end of his address, he insisted upon young boys and girls of the society to constantly remember the contribution their ancestors had made from time to time to strengthen society. He said that the need of the hour was to create a strong society based on the principles of equality and justice, which could be ensured by not forgetting the martyrdom of the young and the old to save the honour of Mother India.

Pandit Vaishnavi persevered to get a favourable response from the authorities, whosoever they were, to settle the pending issues of Kashmiri refugees who were rendered homeless. He always looked cheerful despite his age. His positive



mind enabled him to physically reach out to those in need of help. He had a clear conscience, as his mind was free from any malice which pushes one to avarice, contempt and ill will for others. He even supported the causes of the weaker among the Muslim and Sikh communities. He would often say that for happiness to come, it was essential that we first settle our conflicts internally and be at peace with ourselves. Thus, he was seen helping those in need as best as possible. He would also spend a part of his retirement pension to fulfil the requirements of the needy.

### A Patriot Akin to a Soldier

Born in Jammu in a middle-class Saraswat Brahmin Kashmiri Pandit family, Amarnath Vaishnavi was the epitome of the Sharda culture of Kashmir, which speaks volumes about the age-old Vedic Sanskriti of Kashmir. This Sanskriti serves as a link between Kashmir and the rest of the country. Due to his early schooling in Jammu, he had imbibed almost all the niceties prevailing in the Dogra culture of Jammu. He loved to wear an Achkan (a long coat) and a pyjama with a turban on his head purely in a Dogra style, giving him a majestic appearance. He would often say that his mother tongue was both Kashmiri and Dogri.

Though he was a revolutionary, he had a calm temperament. He always had on his lips the names of revolutionaries who fought for India's independence. It is all the more interesting to note that while leading all the agitations, he adopted nonviolent techniques and remained vigilant to see that the mob did not go violent. Affectionately known by the name "Lalaji" by his family members and his close associates, Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi was known among the masses by the name "Jaikara". He was a gifted artist and was often seen with colours, canvas and the brush, making portraits and paintings. He was also a good storyteller. During my childhood days, he would tell me inspiring stories of freedom fighters who sacrificed their lives to attain India's freedom and of social reformers who were the propagators of peace, harmony



and equality. Pandit Amarnath's soft voice matched his smiling brown eyes. He enthralled me with a world he had created from the pages of history and impressed me greatly during my formative years. I could successfully balance myself between the rationalism of our age-old Indian culture and the Marxism of the 19th century prevalent in the world outside. He was a father figure to me.

When people of eminence pass away, and their legacies are ignored by those who are living, it is true that there are no roads, statues, buildings or schools named after them but their legacies are more enduring in the form of love, which they preach throughout their lives. "Jaikara", a slogan with which he would begin his address, was a mantra for his people, for it would emotionally integrate them into one whole, having one goal in view, that which was set forth for them by their leaders. He was a mass leader and was seen moving through the crowds, meeting people individually with humility to know about their sufferings, particularly during the two decades of their exile after the year 1990 when they were forced to leave their homes in Kashmir. His role model was Professor Madhav Rao Sadashiv Rao Golwalkar, affectionately called Guruji by his followers. He held his elder brother, Pandit Gopinath Vaishnavi, in high esteem as he had looked after him in his early childhood days when his mother had passed away. He also held in high regard the three leading political stalwarts of India, namely Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Shri Lal Krishan Advani and Shri Kedar Nath Sahani. He considered them the leading lights who were always with him in his struggle to remove the sufferings of Hindu refugees of Kashmir.

Pandit Amarnath also had his eyes focused on the prevailing socio-political system of the country. He believed that people used corrupt means only when the system allowed them to do so, but the system is always made up of people who tend to be corrupt. Therefore, to break this vicious circle, he believed in transforming the system along with individuals, which was in line with the concept of integral humanism of Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyay. He called Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyay his political guru. He said that Dr Ambedkar's



greatest contribution was the constitution of India, and Pandit Deen Dayal's contribution was integral humanism. He said that in present-day Indian politics, the feeling of jealousy prevails, and it is liberal humanism that can pave the way to replace the roots of jealousy by sowing the seeds of humanism. He was highly inspired by Shri Nanaji Deshmukh, an RSS ideologue and BJP Leader, who left politics at the age of sixty and engaged himself in uplifting the lot in the villages of the Gonda district of Uttar Pradesh, which he adopted. Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, while quoting Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyay, would often say that our country's independence from British rule was meaningless unless we were conscious of our national identity.

Pandit Vaishnavi was trained in fine arts; he did not pursue this further as a career because he wanted to become a teacher. During his youth, he was inspired by a film entitled "SIKANDAR-E-AZAM". He was influenced by one of its characters named Aristotle, who was a Greek philosopher and the teacher of Sikander (Alexander), who was the king. He gained an impression, not from Sikandar's life but Aristotle's, that a good teacher alone can produce good citizens, who, in turn, can ensure the safety of their country and the people.

During the days of darkness when Kashmiri Hindus, known as "Kashmiri Pandits", were homeless, particularly during the decade of 1990, Pandit Vaishnavi, as a visionary, made the younger generation realize that they should focus on getting a good education and acquiring skills which in turn would help them to find their place either inside or outside the country. He equally wanted the society in exile to produce scholars and social reformers of repute and feel proud of calling themselves the sons of that soil which created Abhinavgupta, Kalhan, Bilhan, Kayalath, Mamath, Shriya Bhat and many other luminaries.

During his stay in Pathankot in early 1950, he made a tour of India, to which he gave the name "Bharat Bhraman". After completing the tour, he echoed the behaviours within the different societies in India. He believed that the country as a whole belongs to every Indian in every part of the country he resides in.



During his stay in Punjab in the early fifties, he worked as a cementing force between different castes and was instrumental in bringing together the boys and girls of different communities to a common playground and a common platform as a teacher. As an activist of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad in Jammu during the year 1984-86, he worked in different villages to serve the weak and neglected segments of the society with the mantra "EK HREDAY HO BHARAT JANANI", which means "Let All Indians be Emotionally One".

Pandit Vaishnavi went door to door in 2011 to involve people in creative social activities, which in turn brought smiles to their faces and hope in their hearts. In this context, he would quote here a veteran freedom fighter and social leader par excellence respected Pt. Madan Mohan Malviya who knocked on every door to see that his ambitious plan of establishing a university at Varanasi called B.H.U. was fulfilled.

At times, men of humility have to endure insults and injuries and remain undeterred in all situations, for they understand the reality of the world and are wise enough spiritually and attach greater importance to moral values, spiritual teachings and words of wisdom. Humility is man's eternal characteristic, and there is no room for ego, provided one detaches himself from the materialistic comforts. Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi was one such great soul for whom ego was ignorance. Being a devotee of Lord Krishna, he had dissolved himself in the ocean of bliss. He never got unnerved in uneven circumstances. The years from 1990 to 2000 were the most challenging years for him. He would take no rest and faced odds in his unending journey. He faced apathy from the government on many issues confronting the refugees and the wrath of the refugees facing hardships. He even had to listen to some uncalled-for remarks from the public. As a missionary, he would stand up, hug all those aggrieved people, and listen to their grievances patiently. At times, a smile on his face turned into a red-hot flame when he made the authorities realize the gravity of the situation and the importance of tackling the issues confronting the society, which the government had otherwise taken lightly. He was known for his plain-speaking nature and also for being a missionary. At



times he had to make some tough decisions independently and boldly to alleviate the sufferings of the people whom he served, even though it would offend the RSS high command, an organization to which he was emotionally attached. In an informal chat with media persons in New Delhi in 2001, Pandit Vaishnavi said, "To attain sanyas (relinquish the worldly life) when the country needs us is the worst form of betrayal." When asked what his achievement was as a mass leader, he said, *"For me, the idea of success has always been to live a dignified life. I believe in living my life on my terms, dedicated to a social cause for my inner peace, without allowing the circumstances to compel me to obey someone or some organization which does not fall in line with my mission in life which I have been nurturing since my boyhood. The journey of my life was fascinating, even when I had to face difficult situations as a socio-political activist. At the same time, I was blessed with wonderful people around me who were with me on my journey and who added to my strength and courage. I received love from the masses whose sufferings always kept me on my toes. I am always open to life and everything that has touched my life; thus, life for me is too short to worry about, and the country's interests are always of topmost priority to me."*

Charismatic leader Jaikara was a man of the masses, loved by all irrespective of caste, creed or religion and was unruffled by any disturbing situation. Many times, jailed for social and national causes, he always kept the interests of the people of Jammu & Kashmir at the centre of his heart, particularly during the decades starting from 1989-90, which he spent entirely with the people. As a teacher and a lover of sports, it was his passion to spend most of his time among students of all faiths to develop among them the sportsman spirit and, through that, the patriotic fervour so that country's interests always remained of utmost importance to them. Being an N.C.C. officer and an art teacher, he looked like a smart and disciplined soldier with an artistic bent of mind, which in turn inspired his students to become disciplined and learn the art of living a life based on the purity of mind. Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi was affectionate towards his students. He would be one of them and listen to their inner voice



to understand their problems and inner feelings that otherwise remained dormant, spoiling the students' mental and physical health. He was a caring teacher and generous at heart, and he helped needy students and needy people in the hour of crisis. He was knowledgeable and always added to his knowledge by reading books in his spare time. He accepted all situations, whether conducive or non-conducive, with equanimity and was at peace with himself. He even went to the doorsteps of his adversaries at times when he found it necessary to involve them in a noble cause. To him, what was dearer was the cause and the people who lived in distress and, above all, the interest of the country in which he lived.

Deeply immersed in the cultural heritage of Kashmiri Pandits, he was proud to call himself one. Though pained to learn from the pages of history about the persecutions faced by the community from time to time at the hands of zealots, he always kept his head high with a message for the rest of the world that Kashmiri Hindus facing exodus every now and then had emerged victorious by preserving their age-old cultural values, only to establish the relevance of the age-old Vedic civilization of Kashmir which served as an inspiration for the rest of the country to know about their past.

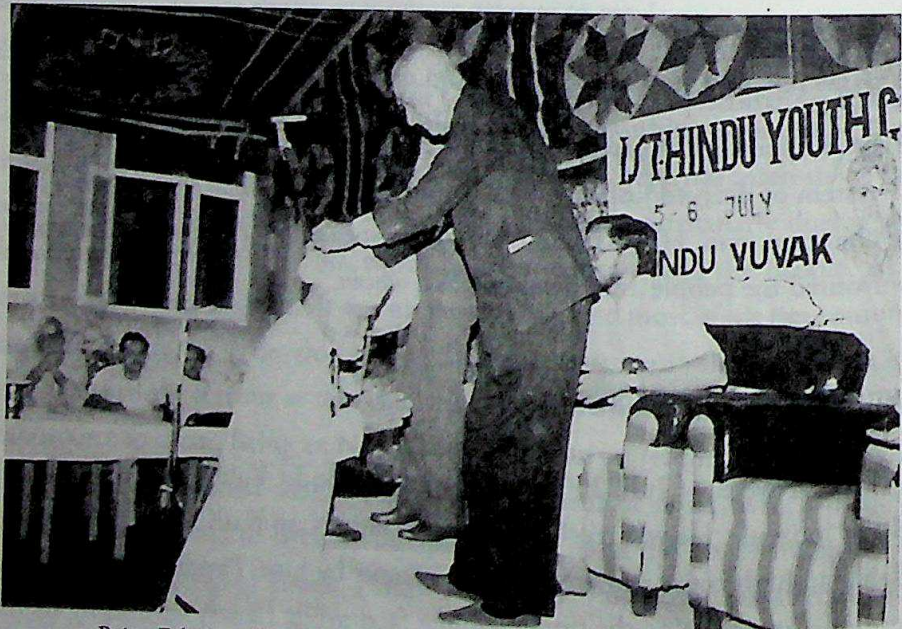
Being a philanthropist, Amarnath cared for everyone. On various occasions, he stood up against the higher-ups in the administration to bring an end to the system of delayed justice, which would otherwise end in the suffering of the common man. He was also forthright in speaking on various issues that confronted the people and the nation as a whole.

### Youth Convention at Jodhpur

In the first week of July 2000, the Kashmiri Hindu Youth Convention was held at Jodhpur. He was received by Pandit Shiv Nath Kathju, ex-Judge of the Allahabad high court and greeted with honour by him. Pandit Vaishnavi was emotional upon seeing the smiling young faces while he was addressing them.



He said that they were the flowers of the gardens of the valley, which had grown up in gloom, however, their faces reflected their confidence and optimism, which would make them do away with the gloom. In his address, he said that they belonged to the resilient community of the aborigines of Kashmir who had ever so often faced atrocities and learned to create order out of disorder. While referring to an event of 1952, he gave the reference to one of the respected leaders of Kashmiri Hindus, the late Shri Pandit Shiv Narayan Fotedar, who led Kashmiri Hindus in Kashmir in the decades of 1950 and 1960. He said that Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, who was then chief minister of J&K state and was designated as the prime minister right since 1947, stated in the state assembly and also in his public addresses that he and his party, the National Conference was instrumental in saving Kashmir from the Pakistani raiders who had in the first instance killed Hindus and Sikhs in large numbers in Baramulla, Bandipora and Sopore but were later dragged out when they had reached Parimpora in the outskirts of Srinagar city. Sheikh Abdullah thus made a mention of his secular efforts highlighting that the Kashmiri Hindus and Sikhs were saved by him as he opted for India and not for Pakistan.



Being Felicitated by Sh. Shivnath Kathju -Ex Judge Allahabad High court



He had also said this while enacting the law in Jammu & Kashmir state legislature known as "land to the tillers". He believed that such a law would lead to land reforms in the state, benefitting the farmers. This, however, rendered many landowners penniless, and the majority of them were the Hindus of Kashmir. The act meant that these landowners who were not tilling their lands themselves were not the owners, and the right to possess that land was given to those who were tilling the lands of the absent landowners. Thus, the absent landowners, whose only income was the income which they derived from their yields, were not allowed to demand any compensation from those farmers who now possessed their land. This move was opposed by the Hindus and some of the Muslims of Kashmir. The Muslim group was led by Shri Mirza Kamaluddin, and the Hindus were led by Pandit Shiv Narayan Fotedar. Both these leaders were underground. Mr. Vaishnavi said that Pandit Shiv Narain Fotedar appeared on stage in disguise at historical Sheetal Nath when he heard that one Shri Shrikanth Chakoo, a self-styled leader of Kashmiri Hindus was going with a flag of the All State Kashmiri Pandit Conference Sanatan Dharam Yuvak Sabha, to present it to Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah on behalf of the organization. This was meant to acknowledge the remarks of Sheikh Abdullah in a public speech in which he had said that he was the saviour of the Kashmiri Hindus and Sikhs in the 1947 tribal raid (Kabali raid) of Pakistan. Pandit Fotedar and Mr. Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah were seen face to face on stage. Pandit Shiv Narayan Fotedar stood up even before Shri Shrikant Chakoo could stand up with the flag to offer it to Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah. He snatched the flag from the hands of Shri Chakoo and thus stopped him from offering it to Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah. He told Shri Chakoo that he need not play with the sentiments of Kashmiri Hindus. Pandit Fotedar, while addressing the gathering, told Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, "Sheikh Sahib, it is true that you and your party did oppose the entry of Pakistani raiders into Kashmir in 1947, and you toed the secular line, but Sheikh Sahib, there were some ground realities that could not be forgotten. There was no similarity between the Muslims of Kashmir and the Muslims of Pak-occupied Kashmir as far as their social behaviour and their day-to-day living was concerned. Under such



circumstances, you could not have been the recognized and unchallenged leader of Muslims of both parts if Kashmir had gone the Pakistani way. Moreover, you could not have commanded the respect of Kashmiris, particularly the Muslims of Kashmir as an unparalleled leader as you now command. Secondly, you adopted double standards in your political life, which was commented upon by Mohammad Ali Jinnah, who told you on your face when he had come to Kashmir that these double standards could cause your political death." There was no comment from Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, and the meeting ended peacefully. Pandit Vaishnavi ended his speech by saying to the youth that they should muster up the courage like our revered leader Pandit Shiv Narayan Fotedar to be forthright in pointing out and exposing the double standards of the pseudo-secular leaders and pseudo-secular intellectuals whom the displaced people were facing while being in exile. He told the gathering that they should be self-sustained in shaping their lives in the days to come.

#### ASKPC on the Issue of Settlement of Kashmiri Hindus

The ASKPC conference was held from July 13<sup>th</sup> to July 15<sup>th</sup>, 1990, at Mahajan Sabha in Jammu, in which four resolutions were passed under the working presidency of Harjilal Jad. The fourth resolution envisaged that there was no question of displaced Hindus returning to Kashmir until a safer zone was created in the valley for their permanent settlement. Until then, there needed to be a quasi-permanent settlement of the displaced people in Jammu. The Marg Darshan resolution of Panun Kashmir passed on 28<sup>th</sup> Dec 1991; on the other hand, had demanded a separate homeland for the displaced Hindus of Kashmir in south Kashmir with union territory status. Two parallel opinions were now floated by the two Kashmir Pandit organizations, which caused worry to the displaced souls for long.

The historical "Saam Conference" of ASKPC held in 1992 in Jammu had already discussed the main issues with which the displaced Kashmiri Hindus were confronted. All the speakers in the conference said with one voice that the



support that Shri Vajpayee's leadership in BJP extended to Kashmiri Samiti Delhi while helping in rehabilitating the Kashmiri Hindus, who were arriving from Kashmir to Delhi at the time of the exodus, was remarkable. The first two years since 1990 were critical, and Shri Vajpayee Ji and Shri Advani Ji directed all BJP cadres to join hands with the Kashmiri Pandit organizations in Delhi and also in other places in the country to rehabilitate all those Hindus who had come from Kashmir.

ASKPC had taken a stand that Kashmiri Hindus have a claim on the entire Kashmir, like all other Kashmiris, so the displaced community could not be asked to stay away from any part of Kashmir where its places of pilgrimage and places of worship were situated. Pandit Vaishnavi's call that the entire Kashmir needed to be called a Kashyap state was accepted by the ASKPC members, and they opposed the division of Kashmir in any way. He was equally worried that the forced exodus of the Kashmiri Pandits from the valley had been interpreted as migration and not displacement by those with vested interests and the governments at the helm of affairs. This, he said, needed to be corrected, and through the ASKPC publicity wing, the message was sent to all those concerned that henceforth the displaced Kashmiri people should not call themselves migrants any more. He said that the need of the hour was to ring an alarm bell about the fact that the refugees of Kashmir were displaced from their land of birth. Pandit Vaishnavi said this in his presidential address and added that militants had an edge in Jammu and Kashmir, which could result in more and more security risks in future. He said that the displaced people from Kashmir did not leave out of their own will as had been interpreted. He, therefore, emphasized the need for unified efforts from all community members to remove any confusion from the minds of the people. He also emphasized a unified stand while dealing with the socio-political and economic problems of the community. He directed his team of workers to meet the leaders of Jammu Kashmir Vichar Manch, All India Kashmiri Samaj, All India Kashmiri Pandit Conference, Kashmiri Pandit Sabha Jammu and Kashmiri Samiti Delhi. In this regard, efforts were made in the right direction, and most



people responded to this move for unity in a positive way. An impression was created that the community leadership, in its entirety, was convinced that there was a pressing need to arrive at a unanimous decision on the issue of the settlement of the displaced lot. It was then made possible by almost all the above-mentioned organizations to arrange a marathon of sessions in one place.

### Assembly in Exile - Resolution on the Settlement Issue in One Voice

The idea of having an assemblage of the think tank of the Kashmiri Hindus in exile was not as spontaneous as it would appear. It was a calculated move grown out of the series of historical events connected with the struggle of the displaced lot since 1990. Resolutions passed in the "Saam conference" in 1992 by ASKPC and the Marg Darshan Resolution passed by Panun Kashmir in 1991 had an impact on the ongoing assemblage that was held in Jammu later. Some representative types of meetings were also held between the leadership of the Kashmiri Pandit community and the representatives of the government at various forums in Jammu and Delhi, wherein many issues connected with the settlement of the displaced community were discussed. These meetings involved major Kashmiri Pandit organizations, namely ASKPC, Panun Kashmir, J&K Vichar Manch, Kashmiri Pandit Sabha Jammu, Kashmiri Samiti Delhi and the All India Kashmiri Samaj New Delhi.

All these developments are considered key to the consensus that evolved among the community leaders to face the government with one voice in so far as the major issues of the community in exile were concerned. The ASKPC president and General Secretary Amarnath Vaishnavi and Heeralal Chatta, respectively, deviating from the ASKPC's previous stand, collaborated with Panun Kashmir leaders Dr Agnishekhar, Dr Ajay Chhangoo and Shri Ashwani Chhangoo to have an assembly called 'Assembly in Exile' in Jammu so that a message of oneness could be communicated to all.

A grand meeting of these organizations decided to unite in the form of an assembly in exile, passing a resolution on the settlement issue in one voice.



Pandit Vaishnavi, in his address, made it clear that no one at the national or international level was there to empathize with their issues or offer any help to them in finding a solution. He said that Amnesty International was wasting its time knowing who was right and wrong. He said that terrorism required common, comprehensive, and collective solutions, and unfortunately, that was not happening. He said, "As prudence says that injustice anywhere was injustice everywhere." However, the Indian human rights activists followed a notorious secular line and thus communalized the whole atmosphere. He said that the need of the hour was to watch from all directions but work in one direction. All the members reached a consensus about having one voice for deciding the future of the community. It was unanimously decided that an assemblage of all the leaders would be held on 13<sup>th</sup> July 2000. Subsequently, on 13<sup>th</sup> July 2000, a well-organized meeting of almost all organizations barring the All India Kashmiri Samaj and J&K Vichar March Delhi, was held at Jammu. The community stalwarts who were experienced in various walks of life also participated. This assemblage was held under the name "Assemblage of Kashmiri Pandits in Exile." The deliberations started with the selection of Pandit B L Koul, a reputed social activist, as the speaker. He started the proceedings by conducting the election of the chairman to preside over the assembly in exile. Shri Ashwani Chrangoo, president of one of the factions of Panun Kashmir called Panun Kashmir Movement, proposed the name of Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi for the post of chairman. Dr Agnishekhar of Panun Kashmir seconded the name of Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi. Pandit Vaishnavi was thus elected as the chairman of the 'Assemblage in Exile'. Thereafter the deliberations of the assembly started on a positive note and with the seriousness of purpose. Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi conducted the proceedings as the chairman of the assembly. Dr Agnishekhar and Shri Ashwani Chrangoo holding firm to the Panun Kashmir ideology expressed the need for demanding a separate homeland, a proposal that was propounded by the unified Panun Kashmir in its Marg Darshan Resolution of December 1991. Pandit D.N. Kissu and Pandit Hriday Nath Jattu representing the All Displaced Kashmiri Pandit Forum and the All India Kashmiri Pandit



Conference, respectively, sought clarifications on various doubts regarding the status of the homeland and other issues relating to it. Eminent scholar Dr Kashi Nath Pandita spoke about the need to go through the geographic factors ensuring all-around safety and communication facilities with a definite political set-up having good governing capabilities. Pandit R.K. Raina and Shri Hira Lal Chatta, both from ASKPC, said that a settlement of the community in Kashmir was the need of the hour and ASKPC, in its conference in July 1990, which was known as the Kashmiri Hindu Convention, had elaborated the need for a permanent settlement. However, they said that Kashmiri Pandits living under any system in Kashmir in future should not be banned from visiting the places of worship falling in the areas not included within the purview of the homeland of our dreams. Dr. Agnishekhar, Shri Ashwani Chhangoo, and other members of Panun Kashmir speaking further on the issue, tried to clarify the doubts raised by the various speakers on the subject. Dr. Agnishekhar said that it was a good sign that the entire community, while in exile, was united in its demand for a homeland where the community could resettle. He explained in detail the map of such a homeland. He said Panun Kashmir made it clear that an area needed to be carved out in south Kashmir for the displaced Hindus of Kashmir for their dwelling. The said area, with all its immunities, should have a union territory status within the constitution of India. Shri Ashwani Kumar Chhangoo said that the area in south Kashmir was chosen keeping in view the communication and security risks, geographical proximity, economic convenience and political vitality. He said that having access to our birthplace was our right which could not be denied to us. After Pandit B.L Koul and other members spoke on the issue, chairman Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi stood up and spoke on the issue of a separate homeland. He said, "The preamble of the constitution of India addresses Indians as, "We the people of India", then where was the place for some to be in the minority and others to be in the majority? Kashmiri Hindus have been crushed by the majority and minority discussions, as defined by our politicians occasionally." He recalled an occasion when Smt. Indira Gandhi was the Prime minister, and he had met her as the leader of the delegation of Kashmir Pandits. He said when he explained to her



the problems of his community in Kashmir, the reply given by her was that being the members of the majority community (Hindus), the Kashmiri Hindus must be tolerant towards the minority (Muslims). He said Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi considered Hindus of Kashmir as a part of the Hindu majority of India, whereas Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, a one-time leader of the Kashmiri Muslims had demanded the right of self-determination for the Kashmiri Muslims so that the Muslim Majority of Kashmir could get an opportunity to vote for the secession of Kashmir from India, leaving behind Hindus, Sikhs and Christians etc. He further said that it was the same Muslim majority which had created havoc in Kashmir from 1989 onwards, and we, the Hindus, were forced to part with Kashmir. He said that a big question for the Hindus of Kashmir remains to be solved: "When shall we return to the land of our birth?" He said that the solution could not be found unless we create a will to move toward our roots. He said that Kashmiri Pandits were a microscopic minority of Kashmir, and being part of the cultural heritage of India, they could not afford to part from all that which is India. He said the Pandit community had paid the price of being Indians and moved like nomads. He said that it would be absurd to say that we could live without Kashmir; Kashmir is our birthplace, and our living habits, language and ancestral heritage are living legends waiting for our return. Therefore, our return to Kashmir is a necessity. He made it clear that he was in no way in favour of the division of Kashmir despite the religious diversity there. He, however, said that since the majority of Kashmir could not reconcile with the Hindu minority of Kashmir because of the preachings that the majority community received from across the borders, it was now difficult to live with the formula of togetherness in Kashmir. The way out is to demand a safer zone or the homeland for our resettlement. He said that for him, the entire Kashmir was Kashyap Bhoomi, and the demand for a separate homeland was a compulsion, not a desire. When he concluded the speech, he said that he subscribed to this viewpoint with an appeal to think about their links with the land of Kashmir, the land of their sages, their homeland, which should be given the name Kashyap Bhoomi. The entire assembly okayed the sentiments expressed by Pandit Vaishnavi, and the



resolution of the homeland, which was put up for discussion by Panun Kashmir, was passed by a voice vote.

It had become all the more necessary to go for such a political adventure keeping in view the attitude of the governments in power from time to time. Even after holding the Assembly in Exile, five delegations led by Panun Kashmir and several others by ASKPC and All India Kashmiri Samaj were not taken seriously by the governments in so far as the settlement issue of the displaced Kashmiri Hindus was concerned. In addition, some political and non-political groups in the country, including the interlocutors appointed by the government, have been sidelining the issue of the genocide of Hindus in Kashmir. In a seminar organized in New Delhi, during the regime of Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, by a research institute called ORF, Dr Farooq Abdullah, Omar Abdullah, Mehbooba Mufti, Shabeer Shah and Sajjad Lone were allowed to express their views freely in support of the separatists of Kashmir whereas Dr Agnishekhar, Dr Ajay Chhangoo, Shri C L Gadoo, Dr Mohan Krishan Teng and Dr R.L Bhat who confronted them on various issues, were made to cut their speeches putting forth time factor as an excuse.

### Opposition to the Agra Summit

The historic Agra summit held between Prime Minister of India, Shri Atal Bihari Bajpai and General Parvez Musharraf of Pakistan to resolve the Kashmir dispute was held at Agra from 15<sup>th</sup> July 2001 to 16<sup>th</sup> July 2001. The All State Kashmiri Pandit Conference opposed any such summit and decided to hold a dharna (strike) in New Delhi at Jantar Manter to awaken the masses against such summits. A team of a few youngsters, including Shri Hira Lal Bhat, Shri Chandi Ji Kaw, Shri Bal Ji Tikoo, Shri Brij Hali and Shri Ashok Kangan, accompanied Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi to New Delhi. They had decided to sit on dharna at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on the two days that coincided with the summit.



The team left Jammu by train a day ahead of the scheduled Dharna. The intelligence department of the government of India had received false information that Vaishnavi was leaving Jammu for Delhi with not less than 500 youngsters on the train. The next day as they reached Delhi, Delhi police personnel were waiting at the railway station to arrest him and his team of 500 persons. The police launched a hunt to catch him red-handed however, they could not find him because he had removed his headgear and changed his attire on the train so that the police did not recognize him. He was mainly identified by his headgear, and removing that created confusion. Vaishnavi and his team somehow reached the Hindu Mahasabha Bhawan with great difficulty. The police were present in civil clothes in good numbers around the Bhawan. Few of those present in the Bhawan, in due course of time, informed the police that a group of youth had arrived for their onward journey to Jantar Mantar and the group would have a short stay at the Bhawan. Meanwhile, Pandit Vaishnavi and his associates left for the Dharna after freshening up. They had to face many odds to reach their destination, and it was with the help of some Hindu Mahasabha workers that the group reached the Jantar Mantar area through lanes and by-lanes, crossing the hurdles on their way. The Dharna started at 10 am and continued throughout the day with slogans opposing the Agra summit. Delhi-based Kashmiri Hindus started coming in large numbers to listen to Pandit Vaishnavi, and at about 2 pm, he and his associates addressed the gathering. He said that the recent Pakistani attack on Kargil was an eye-opener for every Indian, which proved the ill intentions of Pakistan towards India. He added that ever since 1947, Pakistan had carried forward its anti-India policy, which of course, had boomeranged upon it in 1971 when it lost its hold on East Pakistan. He said those who understood the language of the gun could not understand the language of peace; therefore, the peace talks had no meaning. Pandit Vaishnavi said that Kashmiri Hindus had lost hold of Kashmir because of Pakistan-sponsored militancy and the weak Kashmir policy of India since 1947. He said that Kashmiri Hindus had been rendered refugees since 1990 because of Pakistan's undeclared war against India, and he called it unfortunate that they were not appropriately heard by various human rights



organizations inside and outside India. He emphasized the need to declare Kashmiri Pandits as internally displaced people as they were the original inhabitants of Kashmir and that they should have had a say in the talks leading to any settlement of the Kashmir dispute. He said the Pak-occupied Kashmir had to be freed to ensure permanent peace in the subcontinent. While commenting on the National Human Rights Commission, he said that according to the fact sheet presented to the National Human Rights Commission by the J&K state, only 719 Hindus had been killed in the state during militancy till then, whereas the local newspapers and magazines reported much larger casualties.



With Hira Lal Bhat, Chandi Ji Kaw, Bal Ji Tikoo, Brij Hali and Shri Ashok Kangan during the protest rally against the Agra Summit

Due to the targeted attacks of militants and the calls by Islamic groups to the Kashmiri Hindus to leave the valley, a vast majority of them were forced to



leave Kashmir. Until 1991, 43,364 Hindu families were stated to have reached Jammu and 28,713 to Delhi. About four and a half lac Hindus were forced to leave the valley. The facts sheet also states that 97 temples were destroyed by militants until 1994. Pandit Vaishnavi said the fact of the matter was that the fundamental human rights of the Kashmiri Hindus were guaranteed not only by the Indian constitution but also by the provisions of international law. These provisions, which were violated, should have been invoked to stop their abuse and defend the human rights of the Kashmiri Hindus. Unfortunately, the Indian government and international organizations turned a blind eye towards them. He also said that the only way for the Kashmiri Hindus to present their case before the National Human Rights Commission was to urge them to declare the events preceding and following the exodus of the Kashmiri Pandits as genocide as per the international conventions to which India would be a signatory. The National Human Rights Commission, after considering the petition of the Kashmiri Hindu refugees, no doubt sympathized with them and stated in its report of June 1999 that the crimes such as those committed on Kashmiri Pandits deserved the strongest condemnation by any yardstick. However, NHRC was against the stern definition of the 'genocide' convention. The commission stated that while acts like the genocide had occurred in respect of Kashmiri Pandits and various statements of some of the militants did qualify their acts as genocide, and even though the crimes were undoubtedly grave, they still fell short of the ultimate definition of the crime of genocide. Pandit Vaishnavi, while continuing his fiery speech, said that the approach of the National Human Rights Commission was on expected lines as it had to toe the line of the pseudo-secularists of the country to safeguard the interests of those who were inhuman. He appealed to the exiled Hindus of Kashmir to stand up on their own feet and not expect any help from any quarter.

General Pervez Musharraf reached New Delhi to attend the Agra summit, and he attended the lunch hosted in his honour by the government of India in the Taj Hotel, New Delhi. In the luncheon, more than a hundred towering personalities were present, including prime minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee,

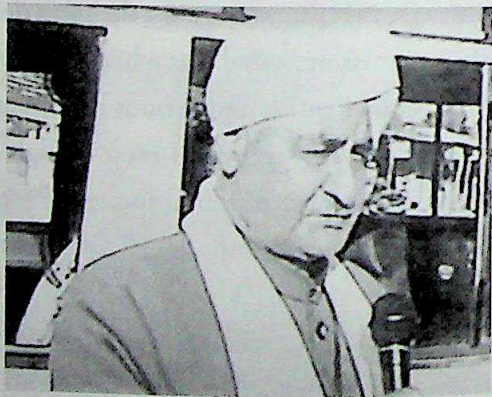


home minister Shri L.K. Advani, Smt. Sushma Swaraj, Smt. Sonia Gandhi, Shri Manmohan Singh and a representative from the Kashmiri Pandit community, Dr Agnishekhar of the Panun Kashmir organization. According to Dr Agnishekhar, while shaking hands with General Musharraf, he dared to tell the General that he and his people from Kashmir (the Kashmir Pandits) were the victims of Pakistan. The facial expressions of most of the dignitaries in the meeting conveyed that the remarks made by Dr Agnishekhar were not taken well by them. Earlier in the morning, Dr Agnishekhar had visited the place of Dharna at Jantar Mantar to seek the blessings of Amarnath Vaishnavi, who led the protest against the Agra summit.

### Inspiring the Youth - Many Speeches

In addition to having excellent organizational and oratory skills, Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi had the convincing power to prepare society, particularly youth, for emancipating people from the evils destroying humanity. Thus, he chose the occasion of 14<sup>th</sup> September 2003 in Jammu to make society feel that inspiration could be drawn from

their past legacy, which was as bright as daylight. On that occasion, he did not talk about the age-old past, but he thought it better only to throw light on the immediate history of the Kashmiri Pandit community that had direct reference to the reforms and the



socio-political awakening of the society witnessed during the turmoil in the recent years. Following are the excerpts from his speech:

“India as a nation of our dreams has always guided the world nations in spiritualizing their minds, and we as the Kashmiris who are a part of the great Indian civilization cannot afford to be silent spectators when the entire globe is endangered.” He said that for more than two hundred years, Islam in Central



Asia and the Pacific region had been influenced by the teachings of Mahayana Buddhism and the Upanishadic Philosophy, which the Kashmiris were closely connected with. He, however, made it clear that the need of the hour for all was to tie our knots with our immediate past so that, as a community, we could boost our morale to overcome the shock that we had received at the hands of those whose minds had been unfortunately radicalized in the past. While highlighting the ancestral pride of the Kashmiri Pandits, he talked about those Kashmiri Pandits who had made history during the last hundred years with special reference to the recent past when deliberate attempts were made to annihilate the leadership of the peace-loving patriots whose land of birth was Kashmir. He appealed to all to lend their helping hand to all those community members who needed help. He said that the Kashmiri Pandit community was scattered in various parts of the country and other parts of the world, and he laid stress on various reforms required to be initiated in solemnizing marriage ceremonies and other occasions keeping in view the problems which the refugees were facing.

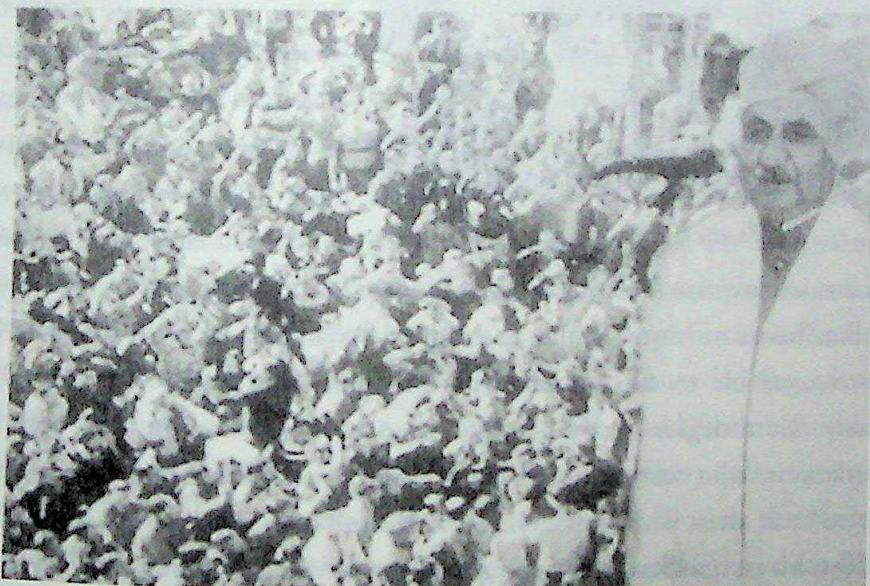
Here, it is important to mention the emergence of a movement leading to reforms in the Kashmiri Pandit society in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century under the auspices of two associations, namely the Bishan Sabha and Dharam Sabha, which had parted ways in the year 1890. He said that Dharam Sabha carried forward the reforms which were initiated earlier by Sh. Bishan Naryan as the chief of the Bishan Sabha, and it consisted of orthodox members of the Hindu community. Pandit Hargopal Koul finally nourished the Dharam Sabha. He came from a family that had left Kashmir during Muslim rule and settled in Punjab. He was no doubt born in Punjab, but the blood of his ancestors was running in his veins, and he was culturally and traditionally attached to Kashmir. He had spent his adolescent years in Kashmir since 1876. As the secretary of the Sabha, he directed his entire energy towards educating and reforming the Pandit community of Kashmir. Some of the reforms of Dharam Sabha were directed towards the certainty of the expenditure at the time of marriage ceremonies by eschewing costly items such as meat, thereby



relieving the community from financial burden. The Sabha also stressed the atonement of the superficial items purchased during the marriage ceremonies. Pandit Vaishnavi said while quoting from the book, "Emergence of Political Awakening in Kashmir", written by Dr Upinder Krishan Zutshi, that Pandit Hargopal Koul also worked for widow re-marriage though he did not attain much success on this issue. He even tried to get his widowed daughter remarried but could not achieve success due to strong social resistance. He said that the community should learn from its history about the strain it has to pass through when it is on the path of reform. He vehemently opposed the distress in the community for two decades, starting from the mid-nineties, due to strained relationships between the newlyweds. He appealed to the youth to develop tolerance after they tied the knot to have an amicable relationship and a peaceful family life. Speaking further on the history of the Kashmiri Pandits, he said that Pandit Hargopal Koul had tried to establish a college in Srinagar. It was due to his efforts and his brother Pandit Saligram Koul's efforts that in 1905 a college called Hindu Pratap College, now known as Shri Pratap College, was established in Srinagar. He further said that in 1926, an organization named Women's Welfare Trust was formed, whose founders were associated with the Theosophical Society of India, and they were mostly British. This school of thought connected more with the social work reform concerning women. Among its founder members were Mrs Margaret Cousins, Mrs L.D Van, Mr Gheel Dlide Mester, Pandit Srikanth Toshkhani, Pandit Shridharju Dulloo, Pandit Tara Chand Saproo and Pandit Nizamat. Pandit Shrikant Toshkhani was the brain behind the movement, and Pandit Nizamat became the heart and soul of the movement. A group of young men working along with Pandit Shrikanth Toshkhani made efforts to make their views known more so when, after the death of Pandit Hargopal Koul, the Dharma Sabha was controlled by the conservative group of Kashmiri Pandits under the presidentship of Pandit Amar Nath Kak. This younger group, known as the fraternity, worked to spread education among women and freedom for widowed women to remarry. A senior member of the Kashmiri Pandit community Pandit Prem Nath Bazaz, also joined this group in 1930.



On the occasion of Holocaust Day on 19th January 2004, at Kashmiri Samiti New Delhi, Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi said that his intention behind mentioning the ancestry of Kashmiri Pandits with the examples from the lives of the ancestors in the immediate past was to develop among the members of the Kashmiri Hindu youth in exile, a curiosity to know their ancestors who in the yesteryears worked hard to eradicate social evils. He said that youngsters could move mountains with the guidance of elders. According to him, the need of the hour was to open academic institutions to impart technical skills and academic knowledge while also maintaining links with cultural and religious values.



He even praised the efforts of Shri R.K. Bhat, a young boy who, under the guidance of Pandit Janki Nath Koul, a renowned social activist and Shri Pran Nath Sadhu, a young entrepreneur, established a small hospital called Vistasta at Muthi in Jammu. He expected more youth to come forward with similar motives. He even praised the respected doctors of the community who wholeheartedly devoted their time to the community members to restore confidence among the aged and ailing members to help them to overcome the shock due to the forced exodus. He lauded the role of Dr Kundan Lal



Chowdhary, who also contributed to the ongoing struggle of the community in exile. Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi did not stop there. He kept his audience spellbound when he lauded the role of some of the martyrs of yesteryears and made an appeal that the community members, particularly the youth, needed



Pandit Kashyap Bandhu

to follow in their footsteps to prove themselves as the true sons of India. He said that Pandit Tika Lal Taploo was a fearless political leader and a patriot par excellence. He was brave enough to face the ordeals when in 1975, he joined Shri Jay Prakash Narayan's Sangarsh Samiti to fight The Emergency. He was an efficient lawyer who pleaded

the cases of downtrodden members of society free of charge without following any bias based on caste, colour or religion. As an RSS activist, he made his services available to every Kashmiri who needed his help. While in police custody, third-degree methods were adopted by police on him and his companions, who were arrested along with him at Lal Chowk when they courted their arrest while on Satyagraha. He and his companions, Shri Madan Lal Khushu and Shiban Krishan Pandita, were treated as criminals. They were handcuffed and dragged through busy markets to be produced before the magistrate of Srinagar court, which was even protested by the bar members of the court. Pandit Vaishnavi also reminded the people of some more known faces of the community, namely Pandit Kashyap Bandhu, Pandit Shiv Rattan Gir, Pandit Jia Lal Kilum, Pandit Shiv Narayan Fotedar and Pandit Gopi Krishan Koul, whom he called the torch bearers of Kashmiri Pandits. He said that Pandit Kashyap Bandhu was the man who revolutionized society by changing the dress code of women, bringing it at par with the national dress code. He also created awareness about bringing women to par with menfolk as



far as their education was concerned. Shiv Rattan Gir was the political mentor of the community who made the community politically and socially conscious, particularly after the death of Pandit Hargopal Koul when the uprising against Maharaja Hari Singh in Kashmir was taking an ugly shape and the socio-political interests of the community were thrown into the dustbin. Pandit Vaishnavi said that Justice Jia Lal Kilam was an efficient lawyer known for his bold assertions. He was also a daring Justice passing judgments against the unjust rulings of the government. He was a genius leader, particularly in the middle of the 1940s when there was political uncertainty not only in Kashmir but in the entire country. Pandit Shiv Narayan Fotedar and Pandit Gopi Krishan kept their services at the community's disposal during the three decades starting from the 1940s. He said that Pandit Shiv Narayan Fotedar, who represented the Kashmiri Pandit community legislative council of J&K State, roared like a lion to establish his foothold in state politics to watch the interests of the country and of his state. He led the Kashmiri Hindu community even when facing many economic hardships. He even silenced Maulana Masudi, the 'Bishma Pitamah' of Kashmir politics, in the Rajya Sabha in the 1950s when he challenged Maulana's concept of plebiscite in Kashmir. Amarnath said that Pandit Gopi Kishan kept himself busy looking after the destitute of Kashmir. As a scholar, he authored the world-famous Kundalini Yoga, which earned laurels for him. Dr K.L. Chowdhury, associated with Panun Kashmir, remained attached for a longer period with the Kashmir Medical Emergency Fund Mission and arranged financial help to the patients of the society who required huge funds for their treatment. It was due to his efforts that the Shriya Bhatt Hospital started working at Durga Nagar, where free treatment was made available to the patients who needed immediate care. A school was also opened under his guidance at Batar Balia for displaced Kashmiri children, where midday meals were also served. In the end, Pandit Vaishnavi, while admiring the role of charitable organizations and some individuals of the community, namely Ravindar Mohaldar and Satish Wattal, for running a school named "Sachal the Matamal", made a lasting appeal to the youth to come forward for the cause of serving the people. He cited the



example of Pandit Prem Nath Bhat, who was a reputed lawyer and a journalist who contributed to the newspapers and journals regularly, not compromising with his faith in nationalism and Hinduism. He also pleaded the cases of needy and poor Kashmiris in Anantnag, where he lived. He got martyred for his conviction which was dearer to him than his life. According to Pandit Vaishnavi, Pandit Neel Kant Ganjoo, a one-time session judge in Kashmir, dared to pass a verdict against the founder member of the Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front (a separatist organization in Kashmir), Mohammad Maqbool Bhat, for killing Shri Ramchand a C.I.D Official of the State Government in 1959, after which Mohammad Maqbool Bhat crossed the border and took refuge in Pakistan. To his bad luck in the 1970s, Maqbool Bhat returned to Kashmir and was caught in the J&K bank dacoity case in 1980. However, the earlier judgment passed by the session court against him remained intact; in the 1980s, he was hanged in Tihar jail. Pandit Neel Kanth Ganjoo got martyred in 1989 in broad daylight at Hari Singh High Street Bazar in Srinagar for passing his verdict against Mohammad Maqbool Bhat. Pandit Vaishnavi also praised the role of Pandit Lass Koul, Director Door Darshan, Shri Balkrishan Ganjoo and Shri Naveen Sapru, both officers of telecommunication in Srinagar, for their dedicated service for keeping alive the media and the communication links in all parts of the country during militancy for which they became the targets of militants in Kashmir and were subsequently killed. Following are the excerpts of his speech on 14<sup>th</sup> September 2006 speaking on Martyr's Day:

He said, "Young blood can win the hearts of the people only when they serve honestly and with dedication. He said that the youngsters must come forward to serve the needy with a revolutionary spirit and should adopt non-violent means while fighting for their cause. The country's history must be studied from the right perspective to serve as a guide for our future course of action. A systematic attempt has been made to distort history. The people of India have been made to believe that independence was achieved only because of the Congress and because of the Satyagraha of 1942, and no one else did anything



to achieve the independence of the country. The three Satyagrahas, namely Satyagraha of 1921, Satyagraha of 1930 and Satyagraha of 1942, mobilized people to come together to fight the British. Whereas the three revolutionaries inside the Congress known as Lal, Bal and Pal and the other revolutionaries who adopted revolutionary methods to fight back the British and also Shri Subash Chandra Bose, who founded the Indian National Army in August 1942, sent a countrywide message that Swaraj is the birthright of Indians which can only be achieved by giving blood. The Indian National Army, headed by Shri Subash Chandra Bose, Shah Nawaz Khan and many others, had to sacrifice many of its soldiers while fighting the British forces in India. The Indian National Army's patriotic fervour had unnerved the British, and the revolt of the Indian Naval Forces against the British government in 1946 had made the British believe that the sooner they quit India, the better it could serve the interests of the British."

In this way, Pandit Amarnath developed a feeling of nationalism among those who listened patiently to him. Pandit Amarnath had the names of great men and women of India on his lips. Among many such personalities, he quoted more often are Tantiya Tope, Maharani Lakshmi Bai and Subash Chandra Bose. He called them the brave warriors of the country who dared to challenge foreign invaders. He loved Sikhism and called the Sikhs the saviours of the glory of India. He also revered the spiritual personalities of Kashmir and emphasized the need to know more and more about our warriors and saints. He said that their teachings could guide us and mould our lifestyle to build India spiritually, politically and economically. He believed that Kashmir is India's crown, which we cannot afford to hand over to any foreign country. Liberal in outlook, Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi had the potential to digest criticism and follow the footsteps of even his critics, whom he would find furthering the social cause. Affectionate to the people of all faiths, he strictly adhered to his faith which he called humanism. Having a unique understanding of the younger generation of society, he was often seen among



them discussing the modus operandi for implementing the relief and rehabilitation programs meant for those displaced from Kashmir.

### Mass Awakening Programme -Prime Minister Mr Manmohan Singh's Visit

Mass killings happened in Chattisingpora and Sangrampora in Kashmir since 1997. The J&K Assembly complex in Srinagar was attacked on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2001, the Indian Parliament on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2001, followed by an attack on Raghu Nath Temple Jammu on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2002. The 21<sup>st</sup> March 1997 Sangrampora massacre was an eye-opener for every citizen of India about what could be in store for our country in future. The Americans who had not earlier listened to our arguments of terrorist attacks, which we, the Indians, were facing in Kashmir and other parts of the country as well, were shocked and had understood by then the language of terrorism when the twin trade towers in the U.S.A. got destroyed by the terrorist attacks on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001.

In the later years, too, India faced many more blasts and attacks by Pak-sponsored terrorists. Bombay was hit in December 2002 and March 2003 in quick succession. The Godhra train blast took place on February 22, 2002, followed by the attack on Akshardham Temple in Gandhi Nagar, Gujarat, on 24<sup>th</sup> September 2002. In this context, the leading organization of the Kashmiri displaced Hindus arranged mass awakening programmes in the state capitals of India during March and April 2003.

Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, who was the president of the All State Kashmiri Pandit Conference, possessed a firm resolve and leadership qualities. This enabled him to forge mutually beneficial relationships with the people and leaders of various political ideologies and the social activists of different hues in New Delhi. During these interactions, he emphasized the need to take the resolve to hold the sovereignty and security of the country above everything else despite the differing ideologies of various organizations. He, through his efforts, made people understand that Pakistan was holding India to ransom for Kashmir. The need of the hour was, therefore, to rise above the party politics



and ponder over the fate of Kashmiri Hindus who had been the victims of Pak-sponsored militants for the simple reason that the Kashmiri Hindu had always been loyal to Mother India and had never succumbed to Jihadis in their homeland. He even met the human rights activists in New Delhi and appealed to them to be loyal to their conscience and realize that India was safe only if the interests of Indians were safe in Kashmir. He thus made it clear to them that the united efforts of all Indians were needed to expose all those forces that created anarchy to destabilize India.

As a result of this mass awakening programme, Prime Minister of India, Shri Manmohan Singh, paid a short visit to Jammu and Kashmir in November 2004. He visited the camps of the displaced Hindus of Kashmir at Purkhu, Mishriwala, Nagrota and Muthi in Jammu. Tears trickled down from his eyes when he saw the plight of the refugees in tents and one-room tenements. Temporary tenements were only provided to those refugees whose kith and kin were killed by militants in Kashmir.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, with tears in his eyes, addressed the refugees in the Muthi camp and said that many more tenements like those would be constructed till the ones which were being constructed at that time would get ready for their use. He also assured them of help of all kinds. The Prime Minister was accompanied to all these camps by the Minister of Relief and Rehabilitation of J&K State, the Relief Commissioner, Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi and Shri Hira Lal Chatta. At Muthi Camp, the Prime Minister was accompanied to the stage by Shri Hira Lal Chatta, Hira Lal Bhat and Shri Ashok Kangan.

Immediately after visiting the camps, Pandit Vaishnavi, in his face-to-face talk with the Prime Minister, said that the enemy had tested the willpower of India and that the government needed to have a firm stand on Kashmir. He appealed to the prime minister to ponder over the past Hindu Sikh unity tradition stance, which had set an example of eliminating the enemy that had endangered the established dharma based on humanity and goodwill. He



added that Sikhism had evolved to protect the nation from external aggression and as a facilitator of social integration and national aspirations. Therefore, the country needed a strong will and direction under the present Prime Minister to bring about the annihilation of the enemy and a solution to the problem of Kashmir and its refugees who had come to the streets of India. He said that people were hopeful that a new India would emerge under the leadership of the current prime minister and that the government should not get cowed down by the nefarious designs of the terrorists. In return, Prime Minister Mr. Man Mohan Singh assured Pandit Vaishnavi of the government's positive action and said that the sacrifices of the people could not be allowed to go in vain, especially the sacrifices of people in distress.

#### Reiteration of the Demand for a Homeland

On 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> October 2005, Panun Kashmir, headed by Dr Agni Shekhar, held an All-India activist meet at Jammu. Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, who was also invited to the meeting, endorsed the viewpoints of Shri Moti Koul, Dr Kundan Lal Chowdhary and Dr Agnishekhar, who had said that the need of the hour was to make the world community listen to the agonies, sufferings and tears of the Kashmir Pandit community. They were helpless, peace-loving, marooned and subjected to the worst type of cruelties, unheard and unparalleled in the history of the world by the pan-Islamic fundamentalist forces, who, while staging the crude drama of genocide, inflicted all types of tortures upon the youth, women and children. Dr Agnishekhar demanded that the Government of India seriously consider their demand for the homeland. Pandit Vaishnavi said that he never wished Kashyap Bhumi to be Balkanized. But my necessity is a home within the territory of Kashmir, which is a part of India.



## Second Round Table Conference in Srinagar

On 25th March 2007, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Round Table Conference was convened at Srinagar in which the Prime Minister of India, the Home Minister of India, the Minister of State for Home, and the governor of Jammu & Kashmir, Shri N.N. Vohra and Farooq Abdullah participated. People from different political parties and people representing Kashmir and Ladakh also participated in the meeting. The All-State Kashmiri Pandit Conference was represented by Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi and Panun Kashmir by Dr. Agnishekhar and Dr. Ajay Chrangoo. Pandit Mangat Ram Sharma, Dr Farooq Abdullah, his son Shri Omar Abdullah, Mufti Mohammad Syed and his daughter Ms. Mehbooba Mufti were also present in the meeting.

The meeting was addressed by prominent people. Dr. Agnishekhar and Dr Ajay Chrangoo spoke in detail on the issue of Homeland for Kashmiri Hindus, whereas Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi addressed the dignitaries in the conference hall on 26<sup>th</sup> March 2007. He said, "Honorable Prime Minister, I wish to spell out the compulsions that drive Kashmiri Pandits to demand a separate homeland for them. I will not take much time to talk. Why? In 1947, when India attained independence, the entire country bore a festive and jubilant look, but for Kashmiri Pandits, it was not so. After independence, the Pandits were exploited economically, socially, and politically. Whatever I have referred to is the tip of the iceberg. In Kashmir, the Jamat-e-Islami took birth with the honourable Saduddin as its Chief. Practically speaking, he was a saint. He was principled to the hilt. Double-speak was alien to his character. His words corroborated with his deeds. "Help the poor, nurse the sick, do not differentiate between a Hindu, a Muslim, a Sikh and a Christian and treat all people as humans and alike" were his catchwords. As a teacher, he never viewed anyone through Nelson's eyes. He would treat his school as a mosque. Both the Muslims and the Hindus held him in high esteem. This was Saduddin, who demonstrated the true spirit of Islam through his words and deeds. He was succeeded by Syed Ali Shah Geelani as the new Chief who, immediately



after assuming the charge, undertook three tasks. Firstly, he undertook a tour of villages and towns, big or small, and at every square, he went on saying round the clock, "Dispose of TV sets, radio sets, ornaments and jewellery and purchase weaponry from their sale proceeds." No intellectual, secular or religious person or senior citizen ever questioned him by asking, "We are peace-loving people, then what are the weapons for?" One could feel that the weapons were required to hound out the Kashmiri Pandits from Kashmir. I have not heard anyone saying so, but the events that followed after this culminated in the exodus of the Kashmiri Pandits, bearing testimony to my conviction and belief."

"Secondly, he opened schools where Urdu was taught, and the textbooks taught the alphabet "Keef" stood for "Kafir", and the picture depicting this was that of a Kashmiri Pandit. Alphabet "Zuey" for "Zalim" (meaning cruel), and the picture depicting this was that of a Sikh. I am not weaving a cock and bull story. The books are very much there. The State Government never banned those books. None of the intellectuals or the senior citizens ever retorted that we, the people of different faiths, are brothers; why do we teach this to our children?" Everyone seemed content with stoic silence. The political parties also remained silent. At this point, Dr Farooq Abdullah rose and said, "Mr. Prime Minister, this is all true. I did nothing as the Chief Minister of the state." Pandit Vaishnavi continued by saying that the Governor later absorbed the teachers working in those schools in the State Education Department on a monthly salary of Rs 5000 against Rs 500, which they were paid in the private schools started by Jamaat-e-Islami.

"Finally, in Kashmir, the local Maulvis manned the mosques. Every mosque was fitted with two loudspeakers. This was a must for every temple, mosque and gurudwara, for it enabled everyone to hear the name of God recited with valuable divine words. The Kashmiri Moulvis would deliver valuable sermons and ask people to pray ardently to God like – "Lord, eradicate the disease from every Hindu house, every Muslim house, every Sikh house, and every Christian house." They would emphasize doing good deeds and to



serve God by serving humanity. With just one stroke of his pen, Geelani Sahib dismissed the Kashmiri Maulvis from the mosques, replacing them with hostile imported Moulvis from Uttar Pradesh. In the first place, these imported speakers went on spewing venom against India and called Hindus infidels, robbers, cheats, quarrelsome, deceits and even went to the extent of saying that the beard of a Sikh was the abode of Satan. It is no fabrication. These speeches were very much recorded by the Central and State Intelligence agencies. Your Honour, you may ask for those tapes and know the truth yourself. Banners were installed in the marketplaces, bombs started exploding and grenades were hurled. The whole atmosphere was charged with horror and death. No one knew who would die and when. No one knew whether one would return home safely in the evening.”

Pandit Vaishnavi further added, “Now I shall come to the happenings of January 19, 1990, which were horrifying by all standards. It had been made a procedure in Kashmir to execute a power shutdown in all localities at dinner time by the State Electricity Department. I cannot say whether such an act was part of a conspiracy. People would light candlesticks beforehand at dinner time to avoid inconvenience owing to the procedural power shutdown. The moment the power shutdown was enforced on 19th January, the loudspeakers in all the mosques roared with the sound of people shouting slogans against India and the Kashmiri Pandits. People in large numbers took to the streets, simultaneously shouting similar filthy and obnoxious slogans that I feel are not worth mentioning in front of a civilized congregation. This did not happen in Srinagar city alone, but in every village and town of the valley, all at once and simultaneously. Mr. Prime Minister, I would like to point out that here in Kashmir, we have an all-powerful, all-time spiritual Mother Sharika, the Patron deity of the Valley of Kashmir, who came to our help and did not allow the rioters to intrude into our homes. Had they done so, then I could not have been in front of you at this moment. No Hindu could have been alive. On 20th January, each of us, after enduring the torments and agonies of the previous night, understood that to save our lives and the honour of our



womenfolk, the better course available to us was taking to our heels and making our escape good from the valley. Everyone thought along these lines individually. No meeting of the community to this effect was convened at any place to decide upon the future course of action, and no one had induced us to leave Kashmir. Each individual took his family along, a small bag hanging on the shoulder and left Kashmir for a destination which he never knew. When we left our homes, none of the Muslim neighbours tried to stop us or ask us why we were leaving. No one from the Muslim community asked us as to where we were heading. No one offered any support. Had anyone done that, we would not have lost our strength; we would not have left our homes. No political leader came to stop us. To add here, a few Kashmiri Pandit leaders and youth were killed brutally in 1947 when Pakistani raiders raided Kashmir. However, at that time, we had a bold and towering personality Sher-i-Kashmir Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah in Kashmir, who stood as firm and solid as the Rock of Gibraltar, infusing confidence in us, and we decided against marching out of Kashmir. But today, on 19th January 1990, every leader was in self-imposed hibernation, giving us a clear indication that they all were part of the same flock professing the same ideology." Upon hearing this, Dr Farooq Abdullah rose and said, "Pandit Vaishnavi, I repeatedly beg for an apology, but we were scared of the gun". However, Pandit Vaishnavi continued with his speech and said that the community of Pandits was crestfallen and all ties of friendship and neighbourly relations with the valley had ceased. He said, "We have lost trust in everyone as we were betrayed and saddened. We go to a Minister, and we are told that he is not at home, we go to the Civil Secretariat only to hear that the Minister is in a meeting, when we go to see the Secretary of the Minister, we are told that he too is with the Minister in the meeting. Our files disappear from tables, and no one bothers about our problems. Yes, one door was open for us, that of Hakim Mohammad Yaseen, when he was the Minister for Revenue. Now he is not there, and that door is also closed for us. This time only one door is open for us, and that is of Shri Mangat Ram Sharma. Having lost faith and confidence in all and sundry, the Kashmiri Pandits desire to live separately where they would have protection and security, where they



would themselves solve their problems, and where they would not have to ask for doles. Over and above this, their faith in their neighbours is shaken. Prime Minister, my plea is that if the Hurriyat is spoken to, then what is the hindrance in talking to the Kashmiri Pandits? Kashmiri Pandits should also be involved in the dialogue process without any further delay. Now, Mr. Prime Minister, let me say a few words on the peace process. On the one hand, stands our God-like Prime Minister with folded hands pleading for peace; on the other hand, the person to be talked to (the Pakistan representative) stands with two swords hanging on his two sides, escorted by the security personnel. Is there any meeting point between the two? No, nowhere. I feel that nothing will come out of the peace talks. This is my conviction. Thank you."

#### Honoured with Sobriquet – Father of Kashmiri Pandit Community

Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi was equated with Lala Lajpat Rai, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah and Yassar Arafat by the speakers who participated in his 80th birthday celebration on 24<sup>th</sup> August 2005, in which he was declared the "Father of the Kashmiri Pandit Community" to recognise his commitment to reinforce the resilience of Kashmiri Pandits. The birthday celebration was held at Shakti Nagar Jammu and was attended by eminent personalities from all walks of life. The day has also been dedicated to the Kashmiri Pandit Community as "Solidarity Day". Pandit Vaishnavi was bestowed with this honour for his 65-year-long service to the community. Thousands of Kashmiri Hindus had gathered at Jammu to celebrate his birthday.

Mr. Kavinder Gupta, Mayor of Jammu Municipal Corporation, was the Chief Guest on the occasion, in his address, said that the role of Pandit Vaishnavi was in no way different from Yasar Arafat's position, which he played for Palestinians. While recalling Vaishnavi's role in the Praja Parishad movement, he said that the struggle had strengthened due to the contribution of leaders like him. Expressing the hope that Pandit Vaishnavi would continue to guide the community and the country in future too, Deputy Mayor Mrs Rani



Baloreia urged the Kashmiri Pandit organizations to work jointly for their rights. Calling Pandit Vaishnavi a legend, Dr. Agnishekhar, convener of Panun Kashmir, said that he was a symbol of the struggle of Kashmiri Pandits.

BJP General Secretary Ashok Khajuria said it was unfortunate for India that patriotic people were made to pay the price for their loyalty. Describing Pandit Vaishnavi as Lala Lajpat Rai of Kashmiri Pandits, Ashwani Chhangoo of Panun Kashmir Movement said that he was the inspiration for all. The slogan "homeland" became a mantra for the community after Pandit Vaishnavi stamped it. Recalling the achievements of the ASKPC chief, he described him as the master of the political theatre of Kashmiri Pandits who never left the community disgruntled. Describing the role of ASKPC and its leadership, its General Secretary, Shri Hira Lal Chatta, said the struggle of Kashmiri Pandits had started from the day of the formation of the Muslim Conference in Kashmir in 1932.

Dr R L Bhat, who was the senior vice president of Jammu Kashmir Vichar Manch (JKVM), alleged that the nationalist elements in J&K had been subjected to atrocities since 1947 and the great leaders of the Pandit community, such as Pandit Vaishnavi had stood like a rock by the side of the patriots of Kashmir. The contribution of Pandit Vaishnavi was also recalled by Shri S L Koul of the Secular Youth Front, Shri Satish Razdhan and Shri B. L. Raina from Purkhoo Camp. Later in his address, Pandit Vaishnavi said that it was a historical day for Kashmiri Pandits since a leader of their community had been felicitated in his lifetime for the first time. He reiterated the demand for a separate state within the Valley for Kashmiri Hindus on the lines of the resolution passed in KP Representative Assembly in 2000. A paper on the life and struggle of Mr. Vaishnavi was also read out on the occasion, describing him as a messiah of his times. He lauded the role of all Kashmiri Pandit organizations and elders in the community who associated with him in his struggle to preserve the identity of Kashmiri Pandits. Vaishnavi Ji said that Shri Jagan Nath Koul also cooperated with him in exploring the sources of employment for the unemployed Kashmiri Youth in their post-exodus period.



Pandit Amarnath said that Shri Jagan Nath Koul, Shri D. N Munshi and Shri Moti Koul remained busy solving the multiple problems of the community in exile. Pandit Amarnath called Shri H.N. Nehru, Shri Chaman Lal Gadoo, Shri Sunil Shakhddhar and Shri L.N. Dhar the saviours of mankind for their concern for the KP refugees, which was quite visible during the two decades starting from 1990 when they were heading to Kashmir Samiti in Delhi. He equally recalled the services of the Kashmiri Pandit organizations at Bombay, Poona, Bengaluru, Chandigarh and Jammu and said that these organizations kept the disheartened community in good humour to enable them to stand on their feet to continue their struggle for survival.

He said that in Jammu, Shri Janki Nath Jigyasu, Dr Kaushalya Wali, Shri T.N. Khosa and Professor Arjan Nath Sadhu, along with many activists, remained side by side with him to cater to the community in exile for decades together. He said that he salutes his community for being on his side to strengthen his courage in tackling the enormous problems facing the community in exile. He said the goal was not yet achieved, and the community was still struggling to have its homeland carved out in Kashmir, to which he gave the name “Struggle for Kashyap Bhumi.”

### Call to Save the Crown of India

Panun Kashmir, headed by Shri Ashwani Kumar Chrangoo, arranged a Sankalp Yatra of its activists in November 2007 from Jammu, which ended in Jammu in the middle of January 2008 after passing through eleven states and two union territories. At the end of the journey, their leaders addressed the activists at the tourist reception centre in Jammu. When the yatra started from Jammu in early November 2007, Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi accompanied the yatra to Madhavpur Bridge, where he addressed the yatris, sending them off for their onward journey. He started his address with the words, “Bharat Mata is calling you to stand up with courage, and all Bharat vasis are eager to listen to the bleeding Kashmir which is Bharat Mata’s crown. Troubled Kashmir



signals trouble for the entire country. India is witnessing blasts that speak of the unrest created by the enemies of India. Voices of Azadi in Kashmir, which are tutored voices of ISI of Pakistan, are to be humbled down and countered by being solidly at the back of our security forces. The country's integrity is to be saved at any cost." With these words, Pandit Vaishnavi wished for the safe return of the yatra.

### Reaction to a Political Gimmick to Support Separatists

A fresh voice of secession was raised by the political parties of the state in a polished manner ever since 2000 to receive applause from the Muslim majority of Kashmir and to convince the rest of the country in general that the concepts invented by them could find a solution to the otherwise vexed problem of Kashmir. This could well be gauged as a political gimmick created by the parties concerned to muster votes from the people. It is a known fact that Mirza Afzal Beig had run a party named Plebiscite Front with a secessionist plan of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah for almost three decades since 1953. Finally, it was disbanded after an agreement was reached between Smt. Indira Gandhi, then prime minister of India and Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah discarding all those factors which could lead to any form of secessionism.

It is also true that the anti-Indian elements were nurtured in Kashmir since 1990, and no sincere efforts were made by the agencies governing the state of Jammu and Kashmir and the central government to eliminate the elements which were eating up the ethos of Kashmir. Under these circumstances, the National Conference, headed by Shri Farooq Abdullah and the People's Democratic Party, headed by Mrs. Mehbooba Mufti Syed, could not find any escape but to convince the separatists indirectly that they stood with them. The National Conference-led government got a resolution passed in the J&K legislative assembly on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2000, adopting the state autonomy committee report, which could mean that the pre-1953 constitutional position is restored in the J&K state. The union government, however, took the stand that steps



could be taken to ensure harmonious centre-state relations in light of the recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission. The People's Democratic Party also came up with a rule concept document in October 2008. It was in July that its patron Shri Mufti Mohammad Syed, and party president Smt. Mahbooba Mufti and Shri Muzaffar Hassan Beig announced that self-rule flows through Article 370 of the Indian constitution. The self-rule, as the party envisaged, meant that India and Pakistan could have joint control on certain matters, including the currency, without abusing the spirit of the accession of J&K State with the rest of the country. Para 20 of the self-rule document says that the very project of Indian Nationalism was an impossibility for the state of Jammu & Kashmir because it was impossible for the people of the state to have one common history. Para 30 of the document says that the Indian nation must make up its mind that the only way towards achieving peace in the J&K State is the nonmilitary way.

Para 49 (IV) of the document further says that when the India Independence Act was passed, and the two dominions of India and Pakistan came into existence, the state of Jammu and Kashmir became an independent country. Such references made by the People's Democratic Party, which was the coalition partner of the Indian National Congress in the J & K state, seemed to have crossed all limits. The document refers to organizational pillars of post-independence India—secularism, socialism and democracy and says all these three pillars have weakened. The document also accuses that the repressed discourses of caste and community have reemerged in India, leading to the growth of Hindu rights in India, and secular nationalism has come under severe strain. Thus, Hindu communal or nationalist discourse has gained ground in the void created by the retreat of secular nationalism in India. The People's Democratic Party thus avoided mentioning that Maharaja Hari Singh of J&K state had acceded the state of J&K with the rest of the country. The party's document also contradicts itself when it says that the solution it provides cannot abuse the accession of the state of J&K with India. These two concepts, which come from the National Conference and the People's



Democratic Party in 2000 and 2008-2009, respectively, were thoroughly perused by almost all nationalist parties and were reacted upon sharply by them. Almost all the Kashmiri Pandit organizations laid a scathing attack on these parties in 2000 and 2009, respectively. The Panun Kashmir, All India Kashmiri Samaj and Kashmiri Samiti Delhi challenged both the National Conference and the People's Democratic Party for talking about any such change that delinks J&K state from the rest of the country. The All State Kashmiri Pandit Conference, under its president Pandit Vaishnavi, came on the streets in 2000 and 2009 to demonstrate against the very spirit of the autonomy and the self-rule document.

In a largely attended press conference, Pandit Vaishnavi expressed surprise over the accusation of the People's Democratic Party by saying that its document had indirectly accused the Hindus of weakening the secular character of India. He said that such an approach sent a message of hatred towards the Hindus in Muslim-majority Kashmir and that the Indian Government had to, therefore, either accept the self-rule document or clarify or dismiss the same. In the end, Pandit Vaishnavi said that the PDP offered this document only as an act of hope, and it could not be taken seriously except that the document had emotional appeal for the separatists so that the ties between them and the PDP remained normal.

The self-rule document of PDP accepts that the essence of this document lies in trying to suggest a framework for resolving the issue of Kashmir without compromising on the sovereignty of the two nation-states. Hence the concepts invented by the PDP in the document seem to be a laughter show.

Undoubtedly, Mufti Mohammad Syed's political adventurism did give him the benefits but perhaps not to his expectations. However, it created a Hindu-Muslim divide and provided fuel to the militancy-related events in the valley. It has also come to the limelight that the central government, ever since 1972-1973, exhausted all its channels to contain Mufti Mohammad Syed from being an anarchist but with no results on the ground. The sentiments of Hindus in



the valley were hurt in the 1986 riots, followed by the stage-managed drama-like abduction and release of Doctor Rubaya Syed, daughter of Mufti Mohammad Syed, Home Minister of India, in 1989-1990. This provided fodder to the militancy in Kashmir, resulting in large-scale human rights violations.

As mentioned above, the political stance taken by the People's Democratic Party in Jammu and Kashmir in the 1990s was to create an emotional understanding between the Muslims of the Indian part of Kashmir and the Muslims of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir so that a formula could be evolved to facilitate the merger of the Indian part of Kashmir with Pakistan-occupied Kashmir in the coming years. These Machiavellian tactics that were put into practice by a prudent politician of Kashmir should have been taken into account before choosing the Chief Ministerial candidate for the State of J&K in 2014-2015. Unfortunately, a coalition government was formed in the state, which was headed by Mufti Mohammad Syed. This could have perhaps been avoided, but for the political compulsions of BJP and PDP, which were poles apart from each other, these two political parties agreed to disagree with the mood of the nation, which was not in favour of such a nasty coalition government which ultimately could not complete a full term. This reminds us of a coalition government that was formed between the Indian National Congress and the Indian Union Muslim League in Kerala in the 1960s when Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was Prime Minister of India. One is afraid of the political compulsions vis-à-vis the Indian political system that might, on some occasions, prompt political parties in India to commit political suicides resulting in the formation of weak governments with no performance and with no purpose.

### Prime Minister Announces 6000 Jobs for Pandits in Kashmir

As an outcome of the long-drawn struggle of the Kashmiri Pandit society, the Prime Minister's package for mitigating the suffering of the displaced Kashmiri Pandits was announced by Shri Man Mohan Singh in 2008. The package



involved the creation of 6000 jobs though it was not as easy as it was thought to be. The scheme took almost one and a half years to get implemented, and two years thereafter, it was still caught by the loopholes that delayed its implementation. The scheme, however, envisaged that the candidates selected for the jobs would be posted in their respective districts of the Kashmir province where they hailed from. Keeping in view the militancy and the terrorist attacks which Kashmir had been witnessing during the past several decades, it was not considered proper for the Kashmiri Pandit youth, especially girls, from the community to take jobs in the militancy-prone districts of Kashmir.

Pandit Vaishnavi met the minister of Relief and Rehabilitation of the state Shri Raman Bhalla and discussed its implementation with him. Shri Bhalla agreed to support his viewpoint. Pandit Vaishnavi also planned to meet the prime minister to apprise him about the consequences of making job seekers from the Kashmiri Hindu community, particularly girls, join the government offices in Kashmir province. The loss of age-old trust between the Hindus and the Muslims of the Kashmir valley would render the situation hostile. He even addressed the youngsters of the community to assure them of his support and asked them to back him so that the central and the state governments could be moved to come to an understanding and the candidates selected for jobs could be placed in Jammu province on compassionate grounds. He said that he would have to carry his voice to the corridors of power at the centre, and the youth of the community needed to have patience. What was dearer to Pandit Vaishnavi was the honour and dignity of the people whom he represented. To him, the honour and safety of women folk were of utmost concern, and he was therefore not happy about the placing of these youngsters in Kashmir. On the other hand, the girls who were selected for the jobs were eager to join their places of posting in Kashmir as early as possible. The displaced Hindus and some of the youth under the mentorship of Shri R K Bhat were emotionally charged and believed there should be no delay on the part of the selected candidates to join their respective places of duty in Kashmir or else they would



lose those jobs. Finally, they started joining their jobs in the year 2010. So far, three thousand positions have been filled, and the government has started the recruitment and selection process for the remaining three thousand.

After a few years of their posting in Kashmir, the boys and girls from the Kashmiri Pandit community sometimes felt insecure despite the facilities the government made available to them for their stay in Kashmir. They felt emotionally shattered and could not freely express their feelings during their stay in Jammu. They launched agitations in Jammu asking for their transfers to Jammu Province. This seemed to be a far-reaching cry, and one is reminded of Pandit Vaishnavi, who was not in favour of the idea of displaced Kashmiri Hindu boys and girls taking up jobs in Kashmir in the first place. He was already apprehensive about whether their security could be guaranteed.

### Discriminating Displaced Hindus Shameful

In the summer of 2008, eighteen years after the exodus, two-room quarters were allotted to those displaced Kashmiri Hindus in Muthi who started their exiled lives in tents in the early nineties. On the other hand, this facility was not made available to displaced Hindus who could afford to pay for rented accommodation in Jammu. It was felt shameful and discriminating by the leadership of exiled Hindus to distinguish between the camp and non-camp refugees. The ASKPC took a serious view of this discriminating act of the government. ASKPC, under Pandit Vaishnavi's leadership, sat on Dharna in Jammu to demand a two-room tenement for every displaced Kashmir Hindu family. In the editorial of its mouthpiece *Martand* dated 8th October 2008, he mentioned that this was a discriminatory act by the government.

Finding the government's divisive tactics was a matter of deep anguish and heart-rending at the same time. The government was willfully dividing the exiled community into camps and non-camps in their state.



## Chapter— 9

### Reality Not a Myth

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#### Anti-India Content – A Legacy Inherited

We need to break the silence on vital issues concerning our country and have a fresh look at the conspiracy angle of the events which emerged during the last couple of years, disturbing the peaceful life of the people in states like Assam, West Bengal, Jammu and Kashmir and some other parts of the country including Delhi. This needs to be viewed from the point of view of Bangladesh's and Rohingya's intrusion into our territory, which are no less than fifteen crores in number. The mainstream political parties ruling these states from time to time not only facilitated their entry and their rehabilitation in the states they rule but helped them in procuring Aadhar Cards and Ration Cards as a goodwill gesture. The so-called progressive politicians of the country have even been defending the entry of these intruders whenever the nationalists raise the question about these illegal immigrants.

In the state of Jammu and Kashmir, the two dynasties ruling the state, namely Sheikhs and Muftis, accomplished the task of rehabilitation of the Rohingya from 2010 to 2015. After the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35 A of the Indian constitution by the Indian Government in August 2019, Farooq Abdullah and Mahbooba Mufti have been issuing statements denouncing the actions of the Government. They have even forged an alliance called the Gupkar Alliance to oppose the abrogation, thus acting as the stooges of the Pakistan Government.



Farooq Abdullah even went to the extent of saying that he would approach China to help Kashmiris to retrieve the special status given to the state of Jammu and Kashmir, forgetting that it had not been granted on a permanent basis in the first place. While narrating the events which I have been pursuing as a student of Indian political history, I gather an impression that from the time of Lord Macaulay (a British reformer in India in the 19th century) to Marxists in the current times, we in India have inherited a grasshopper-type legacy that has been making inroads to cut the very roots of the tree of India's heritage. Cultural nationalism, which is the essence of Indian culture, is being targeted every now and then. Though the threads of conspiracy have been woven at the international level so far as Kashmir is concerned, the enemies within the country are tuning their themes to strengthen the mindset of the conspirators. Turkey has started a tirade against India, alleging oppression of Kashmiris by the Indian Government. There are reports which allege that Turkey is offering scholarships and exchange programs to Muslims in general and Muslims of Kashmir in particular to arouse the conscience of the average Muslim youth towards jihad. The Turkish president, during his visit to Pakistan immediately after the abrogation of Article 370 by the Indian Government, said, "We have never forgotten and will never forget the help which the Pakistani people extended by sharing their bread during our war of independence and now Kashmir is and will be the same for us". Shri K N Pandita, the former Director of Central Asian Studies, Kashmir University, has in his write-up said, "It appears that in the near future Pakistan, Turkey and China will be coordinating their Kashmir plan to initiate a full-fledged campaign of wresting Kashmir from the hands of India. In fact, this could be the process for launching Gazwa-e-Hind. The point to be noted is that the countries hostile to India are setting the tone, whereas the enemies inside the country are in a position to provide them with the opportunity for hitting when the iron is hot to enable them to execute their plan of bringing Caliphate to India."



In this context, the behavioural aspects of present-day Indian politics need to be understood. The politicians of the country today are more or less twisting political phrases like secularism and human rights activism to their convenience to muster votes, forgetting the country's interests. There is otherwise no reason to forget that the main cause of the 1971 Indo-Pak war was the influx of refugees in bulk from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) into Indian Territory. The politics of convenience, therefore, has to stay on the Indian political scene to endanger India's internal as well as external security by rehabilitating the intruders inside the country. In states like Kerala and West Bengal, people have now learnt to live under the constant threat of radicals and political intolerants, even succumbing to their pressure to the extent of getting converted to their faith. This all has the patronage of the politics of convenience. Then we have the media, which has relevance in moulding the political behaviour of the country. Surprisingly, a large part of Indian media is funded by foreign agencies, mostly run by missionaries with headquarters in the Western world and the Middle East. During the 2002 Gujarat riots, one of the TV channels, which was controlled by a Saudi Arabian company, did not cover the killing of Hindus. There are some other media houses in India which are controlled by the Communist Party of India and Communist Party of India (Marxist), having their masters in Russia and China, respectively. The print media is no exception to such controls, thus turning journalism into a tutored one.

One is reminded of a comment made by the Communists on the Pokhran atomic tests on 11<sup>th</sup> May 1998. They said, "What was the necessity of conducting atomic tests, was there any threat in view? It is, of course, a Hindu bomb." All these facts should be sufficient for an average Indian to take a dip into the political weather of the country to understand the nature of the calamity that is in store for him, which would govern the future and the destiny of the citizens of the world's largest democracy.

The country is engaged in a proxy war with the Naxalites. The elites in JNU and Jadavpur University with Maoist ideologies denounce patriotism by supporting jihadis of Kashmir and creating unrest in the country, thus



confirming the nexus between the Islamists and Marxists. This nexus also works well in Kerala, where the Marxists, the Muslim League and the Moderates are political partners in disguise. It is clear that the media, the Marxist way of politics and the Moderates in politics are at the forefront of being trustworthy of the enemies outside the country.

Before analyzing the moderate view of Indian political behaviour, it is pertinent to mention here that our country is not bereft of patriots. But what is lacking is the spirit that can unite the country. Ethnic cleansing of patriots of Kashmir during 1989-90 no doubt evoked a quick response throughout the country, and the country developed a humanitarian outlook towards the Hindu refugees of Kashmir. But what is needed is to understand the psyche of the enemies of Kashmir inside and outside the country. The conspirators of Kashmir intend to wage war against India as a country. So, jihad in Kashmir is virtually jihad against India.

The Kashmiri Hindus in exile have a long craving for settling back in Kashmir, but their destination is far away from them. The government of the day in New Delhi may be sincere enough to see us settled in our birthplace, but the formula of compromise with which the ruling elite is moving ahead is not workable under the prevailing circumstances. Rumours cannot work as the issue is so delicate that to say that the Kashmiri Pandits started moving back to Kashmir for their settlement cannot be treated as more than a joke at the moment. The ruling elite needs to be visionary and not elusive while applying a formula of compromise regarding the settlement of Kashmiri Hindus at their place of birth. The question arises, can the perpetrators of jihad be absolved of their responsibility for genocide? Even if it is done, will they agree to see Hindus back in the valley?

Dr Agnishekhar, convenor of Panun Kashmir, while commenting on the policy of compromise, says, "A large-scale institutionalized conspiracy to deny Kashmiri Pandits all opportunities to contemplate return is starkly evident in the valley as demonstrated by the relentless attacks on non-Muslim places of



worship and forcible occupation of abandoned properties of Hindus. The restoration of a few temples will only serve a cosmetic purpose and is not a solution for the safety and security of thousands of abandoned temples along with their lands. The fact remains that it is impossible for the exiled Kashmiri Pandits to return under the prevailing circumstances.”

The fact is that unless Kashmir is freed from jihadis, Kashmiri Hindus who were forced to leave Kashmir simply for being Hindus and being loyal to Bharat cannot be guaranteed the security and safety of their lives. Every Indian should have a taste for understanding Kashmir because Kashmir is being repeated in various parts of the country today with the same motive and purpose, differing only in methodology.

Mewat is a district on the border of Haryana and Rajasthan, where Hindus are being converted to Islam regularly. Certain places, including Ghaziabad in UP, are the targets of jihadis where they paste written posters on the houses of Hindus which say, “The house is on sale”. In Mallapuram in Kerala, Hindus live under the surveillance of Muslims, for they should not live like proud Indians. Hyderabad is under constant threat from Islamists. This is all a legacy of moderate politicians who agreed to partition Bengal in 1905-06 and partitioned the country in 1947 and even played with the sentiments of the majority of the Indians who wanted to adopt Vande Mataram, and not Jana-gana-mana as the national anthem, in the post-independence era. This was done to appease a particular community for whom it is non-religious to address India as Mother India. In October-November 1946, just nine months before the moderate politicians took the reins of the government of independent India, communal riots at Noakhali in West Bengal took place, which were a series of semi-organized massacres, mass rapes, abductions, looting and arson of Hindu properties and forced conversions. The forcefully converted Hindus were coerced to give written declarations that they had converted to Islam out of their own will. It is estimated that at least 5000 people were killed, and 50-75,000 Hindus were rendered refugees. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, the former finance minister of Bengal, dismissed the argument that Noakhali incidents



were ordinary communal riots, as was described by moderate politicians of those days. Mahatma Gandhi camped in Noakhali for four months and toured the district to restore peace and communal harmony but did not say a word against the perpetrators, nor did he say anything in favour of the sufferers. The mission could not restore confidence among the survivors who could not be permanently rehabilitated in their villages. It is said that a section of the Muslims was looking for an opportunity to vent their old grievances against Hindu Zamindars (local rulers), which was the opportunity they got at the end of British rule.

To know more about the history of the politics of the moderates, which is benefiting moderate politicians even today, we may go back to the year 1920 when the Khilafat movement in India was at its peak. The Turkish Ottoman Empire had come forward with a decisive mood to usurp the whole world and to bring it under Osmani Khalifa Raj, to which India was not an exception. The Indian National Congress, as per Mahatma Gandhi's wish, supported the Khilafat movement. In India, the movement was sponsored by the Ali Brothers, who were undoubtedly wedded to Congress ideology. This movement was essentially against the British, who had dared to take on the Ottoman Empire to crush it.

Unfortunately, the same Ali Brothers turned their backs towards Mahatma Gandhi when he asked them to come forward to take part in the Quit India movement. However, many political stalwarts did not like to be part of the Khilafat movement because they were foreseeing Islamic violence in the country. It so happened that violence erupted on a large-scale, killing thousands in Mopla and Kerala and resulting in the molestation of women folk belonging to the Hindu community and hence depicting the real face of jihad. Later in the Congress session in 1921, the Muslim Congress Leaders hoisted the Khilafat flag with the Moon and the stars on it.

Similarly, Abdul Rashid invited Swami Shradhanand of Jalandhar for discussions on religious matters. Swamiji was an Arya Samaji activist and had



started an organization in Agra in 1923 to start purification of all those converted Muslims who wanted to convert back to Hinduism. Swamiji had also restarted the Gurukul study system in Kangra, which was destroyed by Lord Macaulay in 1884 under British Raj. Anyway, as per schedule, Swami Shradhanand met Abdul Rashid on 23 December 1926 to have a discussion on religion. Before the discussion could start, Abdul Rashid killed Swamiji. Abdul Rashid, the murderer of Swamiji, was later invited to the Mohali session of the Indian National Congress, where Mahatma Gandhi addressed Abdul Rashid as Bhai Rashid and declared that Abdul Rashid had not killed Swamiji. The session was held on 25 December 1926. Now it is to be thought over, can this type of appeasement, followed by our journalists, media persons and politicians, be of any help to save Kashmir, Bengal, Assam or any other part of the country where trouble is brewing? Ours is a colourful democracy having pluralistic characteristics, and jihadis are well-versed in toppling colourful democracies and taking advantage of pluralism, considering it as their weapon.

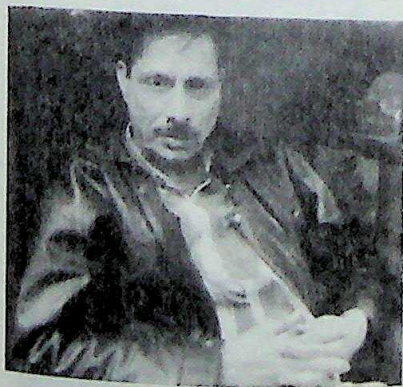
### Sermons and Revelations

Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi's words were precious. From his speeches, discourses and debates at various forums, one could easily guess that he had a socio-political thought of his own which he wanted to share with the people who followed him and accompanied him in his mission to serve mankind. Panun Kashmir, headed by Dr. Agnishekhar, organized a seminar as part of an event named "Maha Shrad" to commemorate the 20<sup>th</sup> year of exile. Organizations such as ASKPC, Kashmiri Samiti Delhi and various other organizations participated in the same. Audiences were spellbound by the heart-rendering stories of the post-exodus period, which Dr. Agnishekhar narrated. These were the brutal terrorist attacks in Sangrampur, Wandhama and Chattisingpora in which children, women and old people were killed. Dr. Agnishekhar appealed to the people not to be deterred by these incidents; such incidents should, on the contrary, strengthen the community's resolve for a homeland. In his speech, he remembered the role played by our ancestors in



building society and the sacrifices they made. Pandit Vaishnavi and others also spoke on the occasion and reiterated the need for the community to stand together.

Some of the RSS Swayam Sevaks from among the displaced Kashmiris who joined the organization only one or two years before their exodus in Kashmir and those newcomers in RSS who had joined the organization in Jammu in the post exodus period succeeded to some extent in poisoning the ears of the higher-ups in the RSS circle at Nagpur against Amarnath Vaishnavi. They were perhaps guided by their ambitions to represent the Kashmir branch of RSS in Nagpur and other forums connected to RSS, thereby side-lining Amaranth's role as a leading light of Kashmir RSS. However, it so happened that a group of Kashmir-based senior Swayamsevaks led by Shri Ashok Kaul, who later became the General Secretary of the J & K state unit of BJP, provided facts before the RSS high command at Nagpur to counter the vicious campaign carried out against Pandit Vaishnavi, but it was too late. There was no let off in the enthusiasm of Amarnath, who was the torchbearer of the youth and a friend and philosopher for the older generation. Those youngsters who associated themselves with Amarnath to bring hope and justice to the victimized lot remained with him for years, and he, too, managed to work with them as a team. His trusted ones who stood by him for decades in the post-exodus period leaving their interests aside, were Shri Heeralal Chatta, Shri Shiban Krishan Pandita, Shri Ashok Kumar Braroo, Shri Bal Krishan Seeru, Shri Shiban Krishan Ganjoo, Shri Rajinder



SHRI PAMPOSH KUMAR RAINA

Kampassi, Shri Pushkar Nath Tengloo and Shri Susheel Wattal. The other youngsters who were inspired by his thought and his philosophy were Shri Pamposh Kumar Raina and Shri Ashok Kak. They spent their youthful lives in the service of displaced Kashmiri Hindus in Delhi for about two decades as the



activists of the Kashmiri Pandit Samiti New Delhi. They had great love and respect for Pandit Amarnath.

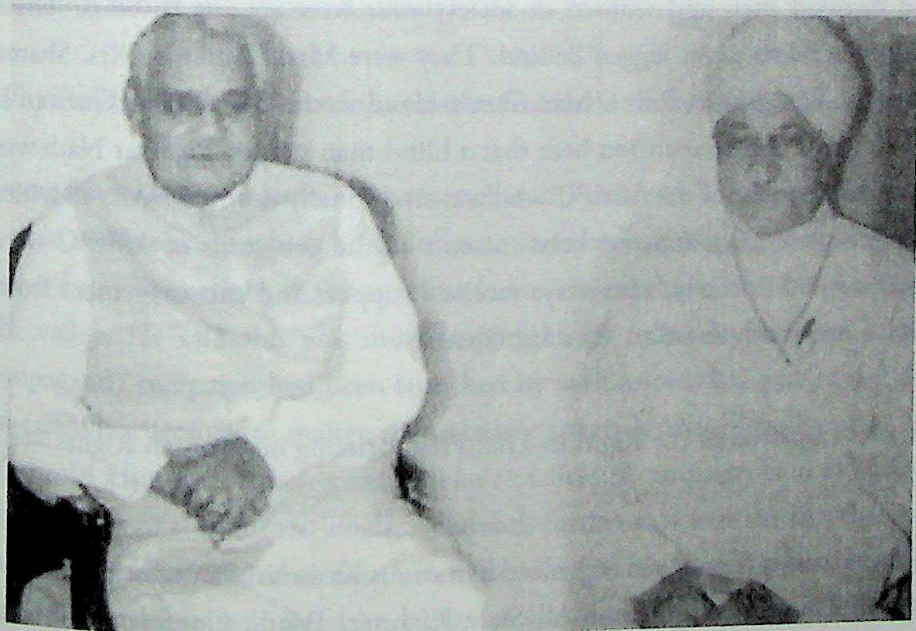
Mr. Ashok Kaul, General Secretary of the Bhartiya Janata Party, has gone on record to say that it was Shri Amarnath Vaishnavi who inspired him to join RSS and that he was also instrumental in bringing him forward as a Pracharak of the organization.

Shri Heeralal Chatta considered Amarnath as his father figure. He worked with Amarnath till his last breath while serving as the General Secretary of ASKPC. Amarnath always cherished Shri Hira Lal's Suggestions and put them into practice. Shri Chatta, a devoted activist of ASKPC, never hesitated in carrying out the projects jointly agreed upon by the ASKPC members. He was sincere enough to help the society members who were facing a lot of problems in setting their records right in government offices. I remember an event in 1999 in Jammu when a displaced Kashmiri Hindu was thrown out by the Relief Commissioner from his office, ignoring his problems. On hearing from the victim, Shri Hira Lal Chatta stood up and informed Pandit Amarnath that he was leaving for Relief Commissioner's office to meet him and seek justice for the victim. Shri Chatta, along with his band of workers, went to the Relief Commissioner's office and saw that the main gate of the office was closed and locked from the inside. Shri Chatta, along with his associates, climbed over the wall of the office and made an entry into the room of the Relief Commissioner, who was quite surprised to see him and his associates. After discussing the matter with the Relief Commissioner, Shri Chatta exited his room and sat on Dharna in the office compound. Immediately within hours, the case of the victim was solved.

While highlighting the event connected with Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee's visit to Jammu as the Prime Minister of India in the year 2003, Dr Susheel Wattal said that a delegation of Kashmiri Pandits headed by Shri Vaishnavi met Shri Vajpayee at the circuit house in Jammu and talked about various issues concerning Kashmir. The members of the delegation headed by Vaishnavi were



Dr Susheel Wattal, Shri Heeralal Chatta and Shri Upindar Bhat. Dr Wattal said that Vajpayee, at very first sight, recognized Vaishnavi and stood up to greet him and hugged him before he offered him a chair that was to his left. Dr Susheel Wattal said that the meeting with Vajpayee lasted for about 30 minutes. Vaishnavi, while talking to Vajpayee, stressed for a realistic approach to gear up the policies that could ensure the return of peace and prosperity to Kashmir and added that the problems of the displaced community be taken on a war footing, and the community be treated as refugees. Vajpayee, on his part, informed Vaishnavi about the measures which the government was taking on various counts. In response to the questions from the members of the delegation, Dr Wattal said that Vajpayee assured that he and his government believed that the exodus of Kashmiri Hindus from the valley was the greatest tragedy of the country after independence and that the government would deal with the issue with all seriousness.



Meeting Prime Minister Mr. Vajpayee

It is important to mention here that Pandit Amarnath received a setback immediately after the formation of a global steering committee of Kashmiri



Pandits in England. The steering committee had to open its office at Amphala in Jammu within the premises of the Kashmiri Pandit Sabha Jammu. Unfortunately, he did not receive any cooperation from all those members of the society who mattered. In such circumstances, he could not run the global steering committee of which he was the president for long. This steering committee thus did not last long. Whatever the circumstances, Amarnath was connected with the ASKPC in such a manner that the ASKPC as an organization and Amarnath were seen as a single entity. ASKPC earned name and fame from 1990 onwards with Amarnath as its head. Pandit Amarnath was keen to see that this organization be represented by all sections of the community. The organization under his leadership had a good number of women activists who proved to be honest, sincere and worthy enough to work for the cause while putting in their contribution in mobilizing women folk to sit for peaceful protests and participating in processions and serving the weak and diseased men and women in society who were staying in tents. These women activists never lagged behind. They were Mrs. Kamla Ji, Mrs. Shama Handoo, Smt. Sunita Raina, Mrs. Sheela Handoo and Mrs. Veena Gurtoo. It is also important to mention here that a blind man named Pushkar Nath was a dynamic activist of the ASKPC who was emotionally devoted to the activities of the organization and was keen to see that the programs of ASKPC were implemented sincerely. He always received support and encouragement from Pandit Amarnath and Shri Hira Lal Chatta.

### Pandits Deprived of the Right to Life: Press Briefing on Human Rights Day

In a seminar in New Delhi organized by various Kashmiri Pandit organizations on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2005, the All State Kashmiri Pandit Conference Sheetal Nath reiterated the demand of holding an enquiry on the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits. All other organizations in the seminar reiterated the demand to restore human rights to the community that was made homeless since 1990. In his address, Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi said, "Today is Human Rights Day and



we, the displaced Kashmiri Hindus, invite the international community all over the world to listen to the agonies and sufferings of the helpless, peace-loving and marooned community." He said, "The Kashmiri Hindus who are known in the world by the name of pundits for their contributions which they made in the field of literature, philosophy, art and science have been subjected to the worst type of cruelties and atrocities unheard of and unparallel in the history of the world. The Pan-Islamic Fundamental forces tortured the youth, women and children by killing them and throwing the community out of the valley." He further said, "Pandits have been deprived of their social, political and ethical rights, and their right to life has been abrogated, which needs to be looked into under the purview of the world human rights laws for which UNO has to play a vital role immediately." The others who spoke in the seminar were Shri Moti Lal Malla and Shri Heeralal Chatta from ASKPC, the president of Kashmiri Samiti Delhi, Shri Kundan Kashmiri and many others from All India Kashmiri Samaj and Panun Kashmir.

### Why Pandit Exodus: Veteran Journalist Gulam Mohammad Sofi Speaks

Immediately after the seminar was over, Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi addressed a press conference in which he said that an independent enquiry committee be framed to enquire into the causes that led to the exodus of the Hindus from the valley. He said this was more important for humanity because a false propaganda campaign had been launched by various political parties and the so-called intellectuals to malign the erstwhile governor Shri Jagmohan and the Kashmiri Hindus for their exodus. Their malicious campaign is to safeguard the interests of the anti-nationals. Amarnath further said that the fact that has not been loudly narrated to date is that the Chief Minister of the State of J&K was not in the state in January 1990; he was shuttling between Delhi and London when Kashmir was burning, after which Shri Jagmohan took over as the governor of the state. Pandit Amarnath handed over to the press the "Meet the Press Pamphlet", in which Shri Gulam Mohammad Sofi, the editor of the Kashmir-based daily, *Srinagar Times*, had presented his ideas about the issues



of the exodus of the Kashmiri Hindus in a press conference in 1997. The excerpts of Shri Gulam Mohammad Sofi's press conference are given below:

Q:- As per a survey by "Kashmir Images," a weekly published in Kashmir, 68 per cent of Muslims believe that Pandits betrayed them in their hour of distress. Do you agree?

Sofi:- No, I am not in agreement at all. The Kashmiri Pandits were not in a position to help in any way. They were compelled to leave their homes, their jobs and their land overnight. So, what is the betrayal all about?

Q:- The reference is to the suffering of common Muslims in the streets during cordon-cum-search operations, crackdowns and arbitrary arrests resorted to by the security forces to control militancy. Have they not been wronged?

Sofi:- The majority community should understand that they are the victims of proxy war. This was neither engineered nor supported by the Pandits. Pandits were the first victims of the scheme, which forced them to leave the state. Therefore, this is an unfair charge "Against Pandits".

Q:- The political Chief of Jamaat-e-Islami says that not a single cadre of his Jamaat was responsible for Pandits' killings; what is your view?

Sofi:- (Smiles) Technically, he may be right. Even today, they claim that there is no connection between the present killings and Jamaat-e-Islami. But the good realities should also support their views.

Q:- Most people in the valley blame Mr. Jagmohan, the erstwhile Governor of the state, for encouraging the Pandit's flight. Do you agree?

Sofi:- It is a total lie. It is a part of systematic propaganda. The Pandit's flight from the valley was the sequel to a plan hatched well in advance. It had nothing to do with Jagmohan.

Q:- Why could Mr. Jagmohan not organize Pandit camps in some of the 30-odd military stations in the valley?



Sofi:- The situation was too bad for Jagmohan when he assumed office. Mr. Rajiv Gandhi (not prime Minister then) came for an overnight visit. Both Jagmohan and I were present at the Centaur Hotel near Dal Lake. Rajeev Gandhi said, "Kashmir is slipping away from us." Such was the situation for Jagmohan. Even Mr. M L Fotedar and the then Deputy Prime Minister Mr. Devi Lal were accompanying Rajiv Gandhi when he said so.

Q:- What was the problem in housing the Pandits in makeshift barracks, schools, Dharamshalas and Institutional Army Buildings close to military stations? The whole race of pandits would have been saved from the tragedy of deserting their homeland.

Sofi:- One has to appreciate the January 1990 situation in the Valley. Jagmohan stayed in Jammu for one night. He took a flight from Jammu and arrived in Srinagar Raj Bhawan the next day. He called some of his friends. He called me too. Had I known that the situation was as bad as it later turned out to be, frankly, I would not have gone to Raj Bhawan. There were just three people in the room when I arrived at Srinagar Raj Bhawan. He offered a cup of tea to me, but there was none to bring it. I saw him go towards the kitchen three times; presumably, he made the tea himself. There was no administration worth the name anywhere in the state, in the valley. The police stations all over the valley were centres of operation for the militants. Jagmohan could not have done anything. Nearly 32,000 Kashmiri Pandit's houses have been burned since 1991. Is there Jagmohan's hand in this too? Even in 1997, people like you need the courage to come to the Valley. Otherwise, it is still not safe here. Look what happened in Sangrampora in March 1997 when seven pandits were mercilessly gunned down.

Q:- What is your opinion of the Kashmir Images survey in which 76 per cent Muslim population wanted the Kashmiri Pandits back in the Valley?

Sofi:- The fact is that even today, your erstwhile neighbours wish that you all should come back. They would even extend warm hospitality to you when you



visit them. But even they will harbour a sense of fear while dealing with Pandits. We all need to wait for normalcy which is not yet in sight.

After the press conference, Pandit Amarnath recollected an incident which exposed the barbarism that Kashmiri Pandits had to face in Kashmir. He said that Shri Brij Nath Koul from Herman Shopian, a driver at the Agricultural University, was kidnapped from his home along with his wife, Sumitra Devi. Shri Brij Nath Koul's legs were tied with a rope, whose other end was tied to a jeep where militants were seated. The militants drove the jeep for about ten kilometres, and when satisfied that Shri Brij Nath Koul had died, they left him at Chakka Hajan on the Kulgam-Shopian road. His wife, Sumitra Devi, was also killed after she was molested.

In August 2008, Pandit Amarnath addressed a meeting of the displaced Kashmiri Hindus in New Delhi. Pandit Amarnath started his address by telling the members of the society that every one of us must be eager to purify our thoughts so that we are in a position to prove ourselves helpful in serving the needy in society. He said it is important in life to think for others when it becomes essential. His sermon clearly indicated that while doing so, one need not ignore oneself. He said one should stop being jealous of someone else's success, and there should not be any reason to hate oneself and feel elevated due to others' failures. The habit of drawing comparisons with others should be done away with, although it is a difficult process. In the end, he said that one should be conscious to perceive that nature is not going to change its course and cannot run as per our expectations. One must therefore learn to adjust to the given circumstances. Pandit Amarnath made it clear that a small child does not know of jealousy, and his heart is pure. He said that we will have to become like a child who is present in each one of us.

In the same speech, he made his intentions clear about opening branches of the All State Kashmiri Pandit Conference in various parts of the country. He wanted the displaced Kashmiri Hindus scattered all over the country to connect with this organization. In Delhi it was Shri Kandan Kashmiri who



had taken the initiative to make it convenient for Pandit Amarnath to go ahead with his plan. Later this idea was well discussed with all the office bearers of ASKPC at Jammu. A branch of ASKPC was established in New Delhi in 2010 under the presidency of Shri Kundan Kashmiri. It is important to mention here that as per the rules of registration of the union territory of Delhi, the branch could not be registered in the name of ASKPC. Hence the organization started functioning in New Delhi and the adjoining states of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, and Karnataka in the name of the Kashmiri Pandit Conference. The Kashmiri Pandit Conference is now working independently as an organization of Kashmiri Hindus in the above-mentioned states. The events that followed thereafter had a sensational impact on the mindset of the office bearers of ASKPC at Jammu and KPC at New Delhi. Vaishnavi no doubt wanted to go ahead with the ongoing arrangement. Still, he was at the same time in a fix and had nothing to offer to his dream plan because it had now become clear that the All State Kashmiri Pandit Conference Sanatan Dharma Yuvak Sabha (ASKPC) could not be registered in and outside Delhi in its original form.

In the meantime, Shri Hira Lal Chatta took up the matter in the executive body of ASKPC, and it was held that ASKPC could not support any such move that could facilitate any member of ASKPC or, for that matter, anyone from the Kashmiri Pandit Community to open branches of ASKPC outside J&K State under some different name. It said an organization that plays a historical role cannot deliver in disguise. ASKPC thus retreated from supporting Shri Kundan Kashmiri's move to carry forward his mission. The fact of the matter is that Vaishnavi was all praise for Shri Kundan Kashmiri for his active role, which he played as a member of ASKPC, even though he was associated for a short period. Vaishnavi even continued to address the public gatherings organized by Shri Kundan Kashmiri in Delhi and Jammu.



## Demands to Declare Kashmiri Hindus as Internally Displaced People

Martyr's Day of 14<sup>th</sup> September 2006 was a departure from past practices, and the day was observed as a national awakening day and the year as a national awakening year. It was followed by taking out a candlelight procession led by Shri Vijay Kumar Malhotra, the deputy leader of the opposition in Lok Sabha and Shri Shiv Khera. Its echo was heard in the parliament when the government was forced to respond to the issues raised by Shri Malhotra on the policies pursued towards the welfare of the displaced Kashmiri Hindus (Pandits).

On this occasion, ASKPC organized a function in Jammu, and Mr. Heeralal Chatta announced ASKPC's demand to declare Kashmiri Hindus as internally displaced people. Pandit Amarnath continued to say that the problems faced by the Pandit community during their exile had forced them to demand refugee status. He said that before their exodus, Kashmiri Hindus being a microscopic minority in their state, had not been given minority status to enjoy minority rights entitling them to some benefits within the state. The All-State Kashmiri Pandit Conference and the All India Kashmiri Samaj had been regularly pursuing the matter with the concerned authorities, even after the exodus of the Kashmiri Hindus in 1989-90 for these rights.

Pandit Vaishnavi, while elaborating on the need to have a minority status for the displaced Kashmiri Hindus, made the journalists aware of various activities which several Kashmiri Pandit organizations had undertaken to make themselves heard by the government and other connected agencies. He said that even at an all-India level, there was a statutory provision empowering the centre to declare certain sections of the society as a minority, such as Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Parsis and Jains. The same did not apply to the minorities of the state of Jammu & Kashmir, and no law was enacted to this effect despite the state government having all the powers to do so. According to Pandit Vaishnavi, Shri Wajahat Habibullah, one-time chairman of the National Commission for Minorities, also said, "The declaration of Kashmiri



Pandits as minorities in J&K state was a crying need of the hour, and he actively pursued the matter with the state government.” Expressing his helplessness, he said that the writ of the minority commission for minority status was not valid in Jammu & Kashmir because J & K enjoyed a special status.

It needs to be mentioned that Pandit Vaishnavi, on several occasions, initiated debates on this issue at various forums, especially at the committee meetings meant for discussing the problems being faced by Kashmiri Hindus after their displacement from the valley. In the parliamentary committee meetings on Kashmir in 2005 and 2006, which were headed by Mrs. Sushma Swaraj, the ASKPC took up the issue of the minority status of the Kashmiri Hindus and said that even though they were internally displaced people, the rules governing the treatment of trans-border displacement needed to be applied to Kashmiri Pandit refugees too as no such protection was given to them who were refugees in their own country. He said that such displacement attracted Article 3 with some additions, as in the Geneva Convention, which lays down the principles of treatment of such civilians. The guiding principles on internal displacement lay down specific rights of internally displaced people to protect their rights and assist them in solving their problems as internally displaced people. India did not recognize their rights because no such provision was available for their betterment. Serious thought needed to be given to such a serious problem under the prevailing circumstances when Hindus from Kashmir were internally displaced people.

Pandit Vaishnavi was also a member of the National Human Rights Committee of the J&K Government and a member of the high-power committee for displaced Hindus of Kashmir. From time to time, he, along with Shri Hira Lal Chatta and Shri Radha Krishan Raina, attended the meetings held by the above-mentioned committees. These meetings were also attended by the heads of other Kashmiri Pandit organizations, which included, among others, Shri R.L. Bhat, a social activist, Dr Agnishekhar, Shri Ashwani Chhangoo from the Panun Kashmir organization, Shri Hriday Nath Jattu representing the All India K.P. Conference, Shri D.N. Kishore and many others.



Pandit Vaishnavi, the head of the community and member of the Kashmiri Pandit welfare association, had the honour of representing the displaced people occasionally. He was allotted time to speak on the major issues that the displaced people of the valley were confronted with. He was, of course, assisted by all the members present in the meeting, ensuring that the viewpoints of the exiled community were thoroughly discussed and heard by the representatives of the government. The issues discussed in these meetings were the extinction of the community on account of the exodus and also the temples and shrines of the Hindus in Kashmir, which were under threat. The relief and rehabilitation measures taken for the displaced community were the other topics which were discussed in these meetings. Every time he attended the meeting of the National Human Rights Committee, Pandit Vaishnavi made it a point to narrate the outcomes of the previous meetings. In 2007, during the meeting of the National Human Rights Committee of the J&K Government, he was bold enough to say that it was the greatest tragedy for the Kashmiri Hindu community since it had been away from the cultural heritage of Kashmir for a very long time. Pandits had been rendered rootless and yearned to return to Kashmir to their ancestral homes. The gunshots and the opposition by the separatists against the return of Pandits indicate that the dream of Pandits to go back and live in the valley was not going to mature. Under these circumstances, it was all the more important to declare the displaced Hindus of Kashmir as internally displaced people as per the international conventions.

#### Conspiracy to Oust Pandits from the Valley: Press Conference of 2011

In a press conference on 7<sup>th</sup> August 2011, Pandit Vaishnavi spoke about the politicians who had been continuously spreading falsehood on the issue of the exodus of Kashmiri Hindus from the valley of Kashmir starting from 1989-1990, when Dr Farooq Abdullah was the chief minister of Jammu & Kashmir. Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi made it clear that these politicians had a definite purpose in spreading falsehood. He said that they had perhaps left virtuousness far behind as they tend to preserve the myth exploded by them during the past



several years to keep the country away from reality. He said that according to these politicians, Shri Jagmohan, who was the Governor of the J&K state in 1990, was held responsible for the exodus of Kashmiri Hindus from the valley, amounting to a betrayal towards the Muslims of Kashmir. He said the reality was that the pro-nationalists in Kashmir Valley had been killed ever since September 1989. These killings, which included the killings of Kashmiri Hindu leadership, had terrorized the Hindus as a whole. Notices were pasted on the electric poles in the streets listing the names of Kashmiri Hindus and calling them 'Mukhbirs' (informers). These listed people were thus announced to be publicly killed. These circumstances forced the Hindu community to quit the valley. Such activities by the terrorists had started in September 1989, and the Hindus started leaving the valley in the subsequent months of November and December 1989, and this was much earlier than Shri Jagmohan's taking over as the Governor of the State. He took over as the Governor on 19<sup>th</sup> January 1990. Pandit Amarnath said that for Shri Jagmohan, it was an uphill task to normalize the situation as the administration of the state had collapsed during the regime of Dr Farooq Abdullah. The Governor had an enormous responsibility to bring the administration on the right track. He had no time to connect with the Kashmiri Hindus and become their guide and philosopher. He said that realities are much more exhaustive and accurate to prove that the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front, a front-ranking militant outfit of Kashmir with the help of other separatist groups, had a definite goal in view, and that was to free Kashmir from the Hindus to clear the road for establishing 'Nizam-e-Mustafa'. He said that the sermons broadcast on the public address system of the mosques in Srinagar on the 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> of January 1990 were to define the aim of Jihad in Kashmir. The broadcast made it clear that the aim of Jihadis was Azadi (freedom), and it enjoined all the followers of Tauheed to participate in Jihad – 'The crusade for the establishment of Kashmir into an Islamic Society.' According to them, the non-Muslims could only live in the Islamic Society if they accepted Islamic Laws. The non-Muslims here had always helped the usurpers from outside to enslave Muslim masses in Kashmir. Therefore, their only option was to quit Pak sar-zameen (the sacred land).



According to their creed, the Muslims had always protected the non-Muslims, but the non-Muslims had taken a course of treachery and always supported the imposters to enslave Muslims. Now they were to leave because the day of reckoning was on their heads.

Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi also quoted the daily local newspaper 'Alsafa' dated 14<sup>th</sup> April 1990, which said that the spokesman of the Hizbul Mujahideen had held a meeting of the area commanders the day before, in which a decision was taken to give an ultimatum to Kashmiri Hindus to leave Kashmir in two days because they had become instruments of Indian imperialism. He said, "The Hindus have received arms training from outside the valley and have drawn plans to foment disturbances of serious nature. The Hindus of Kashmir (Pandits) are responsible for the arrest of Mujahideens as well."

Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi further said that the leading young engineers from the Kashmiri Hindu Community, namely Shri Balkrishan Ganjoo and Shri Naveen Saproo, working in the Telecommunication Department of the Government of India in Srinagar, were gunned down immediately after the sermons were broadcast from the mosques on 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> January 1990. The engineers were keeping the communication link between Kashmir and Delhi alive. It was followed by the killing of the Deputy Director of Food and Supply in his office and the Director, Doordarshan Shri Lasa Koul and many others.

Pandit Amarnath said that a plan to eliminate Kashmiri Hindus was hatched by Pakistan in collaboration with the separatist leaders of Kashmir, and the plan was executed in letter and spirit. He said that this is an open secret which need not be denied by the State politicians who still have a soft corner for the separatists and Jihadis.

At the end of his Press Conference, Pandit Amarnath raised a question as to why the Government of India was not bold enough to destroy the terror camps in Pakistan so that people on the Indian side of the border could get a sound sleep in the absence of gunshots. He said that the return of Kashmiri Hindus



to the valley with honour and dignity is an issue which is alive but has not been addressed by the Government. He said that the Jagti and other townships created for the displaced Kashmiri Hindus in Jammu and Srinagar could not answer the question of when and in which manner the Kashmiri Hindu Community is to be rehabilitated. In his concluding remarks, he said that because of illegal encroachments on their lands, only a few hundred Kashmiri Hindus could go to Kashmir and knock at the doors of the court in Kashmir to evacuate their lands from illegal occupation. They could do this only when they dared to enter the valley under uneven circumstances. The majority of Kashmiri Hindus who could not enter the valley because of threat perceptions could not move to Kashmir and get information about their lost properties. Had the Government not allowed the situation to come so far, the properties of Kashmiri Hindus could have been saved. He said a large number of properties were sold in distress by the displaced community at prices far lower than the market value of the properties. No doubt, a bill in 1997 was enacted by the State Government preventing the distress sale of the properties of the displaced community, but the law mostly remained on paper. The local administration failed to implement the enactment. He said that it is equally true that, to date, the whole narrative is being revolved around the separatists by the Government and the human rights activists, whereas the Kashmiri Hindus are the real stakeholders and the first victims of Jihad. They stand ignored by the authorities, whosoever they are.

### Parliamentary Committee Meeting 2012

In the parliamentary committee meeting presided by Shri Venkaiah Naidu on Kashmir in May 2012, Pandit Vaishnavi and the representatives of other Kashmiri Pandit organizations stressed the need to declare the Pandits as internally displaced people. Pandit Amarnath expressed anguish that the government of India was hiding behind some rules which did not permit the declaration of even the forcibly displaced people as internally displaced people. Pandit Vaishnavi also said that due to the constant threat posed to the temples



and shrines which were the seats of saints and sages in Kashmir, Hindus of Kashmir must be given the right to manage and maintain the religious places of Kashmir. Accordingly, a private members bill was introduced in the J&K state assembly. Due to certain political exigencies, the bill was not passed. He asked the representatives of the Government who were present in the meeting as to how long would their demands be dismissed by the government.

Pandit Moti Koul and other representatives of the community, however, made a mention of the All India Kashmiri Samaj petition which was filed in the supreme court under Article 32 of the Indian constitution in 2006. The petition raised fundamental issues like citizens' rights and dignity with particular references to the displaced Kashmiri Pandits whose rights as citizens of India were grossly violated in 1989-90. This case was, however, transferred to J&K high court for further disposal, which ended in a fiasco. At the end of the meeting, Pandit Vaishnavi remarked that unless the Government of India considered the events in Kashmir since 1989-90 as a massive disaster that hit lakhs of Kashmiri Hindus and their ethos, the sufferings of Kashmiri Pandits would continue.

### Truth About Interlocutors Sent to Kashmir

After the meeting concluded, Pandit Vaishnavi, along with all the representatives of the community present in the meeting, expressed his viewpoint in a private meeting with them. He said that the focus should be on the community's demand for declaring Kashmiri Hindus in exile as internally displaced people, and the struggle to this effect should continue till the homeland issue is settled once and for all. Immediately after coming from Delhi, Pandit Vaishnavi addressed a press conference at Jammu on behalf of the ASKPC. Shri Radha Krishan Raina and Shri Hira Lal Chatta were also present at the press conference. He said that the Indian government could not ignore the bulk of the people living in the state of J&K, who were patriots. He said that J&K comprised of Buddhists, Sikhs, Kashmiri Pandits, Dogras,



Ladhakis, Gujjars, Bakarwals, Dardis, Shias and Sunnis and the majority of them had never thought of Azadi of Kashmir and that the majority of the J&K state was peace-loving and law-abiding. He said that the report of the interlocutors appointed by the Government of India and sent to Jammu & Kashmir to meet the people of all hues did not fulfil their true purpose. The political leadership of the state was also highlighted in the press conference. The report submitted by the interlocutors came in the media in October 2011. It suggested that parliament should have no powers to legislate any laws pertaining to the state except those laws which were related to internal and external security or its vital economic concerns, such as water resources and energy needs. The report also suggested that the state political executive needed only consultations with the opposition to recommend three names to the president of India for the appointment of the governor of the state. The report stated that in case of constitutional failure in the state, the present arrangement of keeping the state legislature under suspended animation should continue for a period of three months, after which fresh elections should be called for. All the members present in the press conference representing the Kashmiri Hindus made it clear that whatever had been said in the report of the interlocutors was aimed at appeasing the separatists. The members said that a federation of any type could not permit such freedom to the federating units, which could create more trouble than offering a solution. Pandit Vaishnavi said that it was not worthwhile to propose that there could be unanimity among the various political parties in the appointment of the governor. The report said that the percentage of I.A.S and I.P.S officers in the state needed to be reduced gradually to wean them away to meet the local aspirations of the bureaucracy. The report also said that the existing nomenclature of the chief minister and state governor in English needed to continue, but there was no objection to the use of the name Wazir -e-Azam and Sadri Riyasat in Urdu for these posts.

The Kashmiri Pandit leadership openly opposed these suggestions and said that the proposal regarding I.A.S and I.P.S officers was not based on the local demands. Once the local bureaucracy entered the national scene, its chances of



growth were brighter in all respects, and there was no reason as to why they would keep themselves away from all-round growth. Similarly, it was disgusting to suggest that names like Prime Minister and Sadri Riyasat could be used for the chief minister and the governor, respectively. These suggestions were enough to boost the fundamentalist agenda of Nizam-e-Mustafa in the state, ignoring the secular fabric of the country.

The journalists listening to Pandit Vaishnavi very attentively enquired from him about the 1975 accord between Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah and Indira Gandhi. Pandit Vaishnavi said that the accord was arrived at after mutual consent between the two leaders, and talks were held in a cordial environment between G Parthasarthy and Mirza Afzal Beig on behalf of the two leaders. This accord envisaged that the union laws would be fully applicable to the state of J&K and that the accession of J&K state with India was final. Pandit Vaishnavi said that the accord could have been used as a tool to win over the mind of an average Kashmiri. The central and the state governments could have subsequently made it loud and clear that no compromise could be made with India's sovereignty over the state of J&K. The two, on the other hand, never bothered to be thoughtful over this sensitive issue and took no care to Indianize the minds of the separatists in Kashmir.

Pandit Vaishnavi said that wavering politics shattered the hopes of the patriots. In reply to a question raised by the journalists, he said that in an answer to a question raised by Dr Shama Prasad Mukherji in the Indian legislature in 1952, Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru had declared, "Kashmir is not the property of India or Pakistan, it belongs to the Kashmiri People. When Kashmir acceded to India, we made it clear to them that we would ultimately abide by the verdict of the people of Kashmir. If they tell us to walk out, we will not hesitate to quit. We have taken the issue to the United Nations and given our word of honour for a peaceful solution, and as a great nation, we cannot go back on it."

Pandit Vaishnavi said that an inherent conflict in Mr. Nehru's mind was quite visible. In 1962 when Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah was still in jail, to the utter



surprise of every Indian, Pandit Nehru, in his address in Srinagar, denied his promise of a plebiscite, which he had made to the Kashmiri people in a public address earlier in Srinagar. It was the same Jawahar Lal Nehru who later said that he had never promised a plebiscite.

Pandit Vaishnavi said that in 1975 when the sacred words “socialism” and “secularism” were incorporated and added to the preamble of the Indian constitution, the J&K state assembly refused to incorporate these words in the constitution of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The state of Jammu and Kashmir is the only state of India which has a constitution of its own.

### Beware of Turncoats

A leader of Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi's calibre who had virtually renounced the world to serve his community and the nation was alert enough to issue a word of caution to the people around him to have an eagle's eye on the turncoats of the society who were always in search of any opportunity to work against the interests of the society and the nation simply to serve their interests. I believe Pandit Amarnath's note of caution needs to be taken seriously, particularly by the Kashmiri Hindus in exile who have a long wait to find their homeland. There are instances to prove that turncoats are born in every age. I have learnt from the pages of history that a veteran journalist from Kashmir, Pandit Prem Nath Bazaz and many others had shifted their loyalties as early as 1940. Pandit Prem Nath Bazaz, an editor of a local newspaper, “Hamdard”, was assisted by Pandit Nand Lal Wattal, Pandit Makhan Lal Mahav and Pandit Jagan Nath Sathu. Pandit Prem Nath Bazaz floated a political party called Kisan Mazdoor Party in 1945. He aimed to counter the National Conference Party headed by Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, as both fell apart ideologically. Pandit Prem Nath Bazaz would hold meetings in rural areas of the Kashmir valley. The party of Mirwaiz Yusuf Shah supported this party called “Bakras”. That party was out and out with the Pakistan sentiments. Pandit Prem Nath Bazaz was helped by Shri Jagan Nath Sathu, Pandit Makhan Lal Mahav, Pandit



Sham Lal Yachoo, Pandit Pithambar Nath Dhar Fani and Shri Abdul Ahad Azad, both eminent poets of Kashmir. The newspaper "Hamdard" got its readership among the supporters of Mirwaiz Yusuf Shah for the scathing attack it launched against Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah. In 1947 when Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah took the reins of the government of Jammu and Kashmir in his hands, he arrested the leaders and the workers of the Kisan Mazdoor Party, including Pandit Prem Nath Bazaz, Pandit Jagan Nath Sathu and Pandit Sham Lal Yachoo. After being released from jail, these three leaders continued their tirade against Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah and the government of India. They floated a new party called Kashmir Democratic Party. This party raised slogans against India and started speaking more in favour of Pakistan. The press notes and the statements of the party leaders of the Kashmir Democratic Party were often quoted by the Pakistan government and Pakistan radio. The Indian government could not tolerate this type of tirade for long and implicated Shri Jagan Nath Sathu, Pandit Sham Lal Yachoo and Shree Noor Mohammad Roshan in the Delhi bomb case, and they were arrested. Pandit Prem Nath Bazaz was placed under house arrest.

On 26<sup>th</sup> January 2010 in Delhi, Pandit Amarnath, in a walk-the-talk conversation, gave me an account of the mindset of England and America when U.N.O passed a resolution on Kashmir in January 1948. He said that England and America masterminded the 1948 U.N.O resolution on Kashmir. It was passed only after Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru and Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah placed a complaint in U.N.O against the tribal invasion of Pakistan on Kashmir. He said that based on his knowledge, America was interested in establishing its base in Kashmir to checkmate China, whereas England was interested in keeping Kashmir on the boil. This was just to keep the newly created two sovereign states, viz India and Pakistan, at loggerheads with each other to keep their role alive in the subcontinent. The resolution that was passed crippled the Indian Army's mission to regain the territories of Kashmir that had been occupied by Pakistani aggressors earlier. The resolution directed both countries to adopt a standstill policy so that troops from both sides stop



fighting against each other and remain stationed where ever they were. The cease-fire facilitated both sides to retreat their respective forces to the places of their origin so that a plebiscite could be held in Kashmir to allow the Kashmiri Muslim majority to decide their fate. This decision was of Pandit Nehru's and Sheikh Abdullah's liking, and hence India was since then kept on hold so that no effort could be made by India to retake the lost territories from Pakistan. Pandit Amarnath said that no news was good news for the country's patriots since Maharaja Hari Singh signed the instrument of accession in October 1947. The relation between the princely states of India and the British government in India was governed by "Paramountcy", and everything according to the "Law of Paramountcy" was based on the treaties that were being signed by the British government in India and by the princely states of India. The treaties were sufficient to prove that the dictates of the British government could ultimately sway in maintaining the relations between the British government in India and the princely states of India. The British government in India had directed the princely states to opt either for India or Pakistan or to retain their independent status. This principle was really in the mind of Maharaja Hari Singh when he signed the instrument of accession with India.

Pandit Amarnath also talked about the Indian communists turned human rights activists bent on creating dissent in India. He quoted from P.N. Chopra's book "Lessons from Indian History" that public memory is short, and people are seen to have forgotten that the Communists betrayed the nation during the Quit India movement of 1942 and joined hands with the British. They even suggested the division of the country. Amarnath said that the socialist leader Shri Ram Manohar Lohia has written in a book named "Guilty Men of India's Partition" that the Communists supported partition presumably in the hope that they would thereby get a hold on the newly born state of Pakistan, gain influence among Indian Muslims and run no significant risk of alienating unformed or effete Hindu minds. Their calculations have been proved to be wrong except in the small measure that they have acquired



some pockets of influence among Indian Muslims and have roused no strong indignation among the Hindus. They have therefore done no mischief to themselves but have brought no benefit to the country.

### Pandit Vaishnavi's Historic Perspective of the Kashmir Problem

Pandit Vaishnavi has been a witness to the role of communists in his state from 1947 onwards. During the walk the talk, he said that the communists of J&K state, who had been active in state politics for three decades since 1947, were running a political party called the Democratic National Conference. They were prompting Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah to keep himself at a distance from the central government and its policies viz a viz Kashmir by raising his voice against the Indian Union. By doing so, the communists believed they could also win the Muslims of occupied Kashmir. Similarly, he said that the communists of India poisoned the minds of the intellectuals of the country, along with other pseudo-secularists, against the victims of Kashmir (Kashmiri Pandits) who were thrown out of the Kashmir valley in 1989-1990. Amarnath said this combination of communists and pseudo-secularists has virtually proved themselves as the termites for the nation and has been strengthening the voice of separatists of Kashmir. These so-called liberals who create hurdles in decimating the terrorists in the Jammu and Kashmir state have been creating despair and discontentment among the people of Jammu and Kashmir by sending wrong signals across the country. He said that the Indian Armed Forces, with their humanitarian outlook, served the people of Kashmir during the years of militancy. He said that the Indian Security forces have been fighting terrorism in Kashmir all these years with valour and caution. The Indian Army has a history of successes and sacrifices and has never given in during times of war. He recalled an event of 1st November 1948 when Major General K.S. Thimayya launched a tank battle at Zojila pass to save Kargil and Ladakh from the occupation of Pakistan even after the declaration of ceasefire by U.N.O. The noble sacrifices and deeds of valour of the Indian Army have



never been appreciated by the liberal politicians who are either communists or pseudo-secularists.

Pandit Amarnath was surprised at the last minute of this talk when I asked him whether he, too, subscribed to the view that Kashmir was a political issue that needed to be addressed as soon as possible. He said that history was an unforgettable teacher. He was reminded of a visit of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru to Kashmir in 1945. Kashmiri Pandits greeted and listened to him patiently when he addressed them at the historical Sheetal Nath in Srinagar. In his address, Jawaharlal Nehru had said, "The Pandit community of Kashmir is a microscopic minority, and as such, the community must have been in deep thought, always worrying about their survival in the Muslim majority area. Every problem has its solution, and there are three options available at present which need to be understood by the community leadership. The community is thus free to avail of either of the three options to free themselves from perpetual worry. The first option is to share the political opinion of the majority community of Kashmir. The second option is to leave Kashmir for good and settle in other parts of the country. The last option is to continue living in Kashmir with an open mind, and in case a threatening situation arises, Pandits must be prepared for any consequences."

Amarnath said that from 1947 to 1989, about three lakh Kashmiri Pandits had left Kashmir in search of livelihood, inside and outside the country. About four lakh Kashmiri Pandits were compelled to leave the valley from 1990 onwards due to terrorism. Many of the Kashmiri Pandit community members were killed, looted and raped during this period when Kashmir was radicalized. He said that from 1990, Kashmir lost its secular credentials, which had its roots in the age-old cultural synthesis of Kashmir. Undoubtedly, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah continued to harp the tune of autonomy of Kashmir till 1975, but it could not be forgotten that he continued to maintain communal harmony till his last breath. It was the Congress-ism that swayed over patriotism in the state of Jammu and Kashmir which led Nehru to insist upon Dr B R Ambedkar, the chief architect of the Indian constitution to introduce a provision in the



constitution that could keep his friend Sheikh Abdullah in good humour. That was the occasion when Article 370 was incorporated into the Indian constitution in the year 1949 during the process of drafting the constitution of India by the expert committee. Article 370 enables J& K to have its constitution, a flag and a Prime minister instead of a chief minister and a Sadr-e-Riyasat instead of a Governor. Nehru did not stop here. In 1954, then President of India, Dr Rajinder Prasad, issued an ordinance for incorporating Article 35 A in the constitution of India. The ordinance has still not been passed by the two houses of the parliament, whereas Article 35 A is invoked until today. Article 35 A debar citizens of the rest of India who are not a domicile of J& K state from acquiring any immovable property in the state. It also debar those women of the state who married men belonging to other states from owning property in the state. It cannot be denied that Article 370 has been cut into size in a phased manner on different occasions within a few years after Dr Shyamaprasad Mukherjee's martyrdom in Srinagar. The permit system, which was in vogue, envisaged that whosoever wished to enter the state of Jammu and Kashmir and returned from that place needed to seek prior permission from the government of J&K before making any such move. This system was abolished. The jurisdiction of the supreme court of India and that of the Comptroller & Auditor General of India was extended over the affairs of the state during the last phase of the 1950s. The span of control of the Indian government over J&K was initially limited to Defense, Foreign Affairs and Telecommunication, however, later, it was extended. These two articles have a temporary status and could have been abrogated until now. This could not, however, happen because the congress-ism did not want this. Article 370 and 35A were abrogated on August 5, 2019, by the BJP-led government. The home minister Mr. Amit Shah made the historic announcement in the parliament. This has created hopes for the people of Jammu and Kashmir towards complete integration of the state with the rest of the country.

Congress-ism is a thought which never allowed the idea of genuine secularism to grow and flourish. When P V Narasimha Rao was the Prime Minister of



India, there were reports that the UPA government proposed the appointment of KPS Gill as the governor of the state of J&K. However, the proposal as such went into the wilderness immediately before it could be implemented. Had that been done then, there would not have been militancy in the state. Similarly, efforts that were made from time to time by the vested interests to change the demography of the state were not put to a halt. Only recently, when Mufti Mohammad Sayed was the state's chief minister, Rohingyas were allowed to enter the state and rehabilitated in Jammu city. Thus, so many wrongs were done that overlooked the interests of the people of the state, particularly of the Kashmiris, many of whom had left the valley for good, and those who were still residing in the valley lived under the threat of the gun. The mistakes committed so far need to be rectified, and therein lies the solution to the Kashmir issue. I, therefore, do not subscribe to the view that Kashmir is a political issue. I believe that the nation has paid the price for pampering and then dislodging from power a leader of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah's stature who created confusion in the corridors of power. This confusion led a citizen born in the state of J&K to go on an unending journey of dust and storm.

### Hindu-Sikh Unity a Necessity

Each moment of his life, from his teens when he joined the RSS till he breathed his last on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2012, Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi was dedicated to the service of mankind and carried forward the nation-building mission of the RSS. He travelled long distances between the years 2006 to 2011, even though his body showed signs of ageing. During these years, he attended all the meetings of the BJP and the Kashmiri Pandit organizations held in New Delhi, Chandigarh, Pune, Maharashtra and Bangalore.

He was conscious about the Sikh community, which had managed to stay in Kashmir after 1990 when ethnic cleansing had started. Pandit Vaishnavi was pained to learn that despite assurances given to Sikhs in Kashmir, some girls



belonging to the community were not treated well there. He was equally pained when militants attacked the Sikhs in Chatisingpora, a village in Kashmir which was predominantly inhabited by Sikhs who were killed in good numbers by the militants.



Addressing Sikh Community in Jammu

He started creating an understanding between Hindus and Sikhs in J&K state to fight the militants unitedly. While doing so, he was part and parcel of the Hindu-Sikh unity mission carried out by the RSS and the Sikhs of Jammu together. He occasionally attended several meetings between the two communities and addressed religious congregations of Sikhs held in gurdwaras. He came out openly in support of West Pakistan refugees in Jammu, many of whom were Sikhs.

On the occasion of Guru Purub in a Gurdwara at Rehari Chungi in Jammu in 2011, he said in his speech that nationality, not religion, should be one's identity in a secular republic. He noted that Gurbani was a message for harmonious living between various faiths, and it emphasized being human while laying stress on simple living and high thinking. He said that the spirit



of unity and brotherhood acknowledged by Sikhs was a significant and organic part of the broader Hindu society, and that was why efforts had been made to strengthen this spirit. He further said that Sikhism was a social, religious and national consciousness movement. Guru Nanak Ji had said about Babar's attack on Saidpur, a town in Ahmadabad, that the attack was on India, on the spiritual culture of Bharat, which believes in the peaceful coexistence of various faiths. He said he would not hesitate to speak the truth, even if it cost him his life. Pandit Vaishnavi said that Hindus must become real Hindus and Sikhs, real Sikhs. Hindus and Sikhs were brothers and the real sons of Bharat. Sikhism was a culturally rich part of the broader Hindu society. He said that the movement of Arya Samaj had a big impact on the culture of Punjab and that the community of Arya Samaj was instrumental in starting RSS in Punjab after a meeting with Bai Parmanand and many Arya Samaji activists. He said that he had studied Shri Aurobindo and Swami Vivekananda, and he found that Sikhism was much like an extension of their line of yoga, a Vedanta into the social sphere. He said he could never distinguish between Guru Govind Singh and Shivaji Maharaj. He said that had Shivaji Maharaj and Guru Govind Singh come together, the history of our Bharat would have been quite different.

#### Receiving Honour for His Role in Praja Parishad Movement

In November 2011, the state Bhartiya Janta Party organized a big rally at Jammu to honour those who had participated in the Praja Parishad movement, "EK Vidhan, EK Nishan, EK Pradhan," with courage and had faced lathis and arrests and those who had attained martyrdom in that agitation, were remembered. Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi was also one such towering personality from among the Kashmiri Pandit community who was honoured on this occasion for being an active participant in the movement. In this rally, Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, who was a believer in Hindu-Sikh unity, said that such unity could create miracles in changing the destiny of Bharat. He also said that the age-old dictum of universal fraternity could be derived from the noble thoughts of Gurbani. The Rashtriya Sikh Sangathan, he said, was formed by RSS to strengthen the harmony based on the Gurbani. He said that he wished



that Sikhs and the Sangh could work together to reach a defined goal, particularly when our country was endangered by the fundamentalists who destroyed humanity by killing the young, the old and the children. He said there was no place for caste, class or regional parochialism in the Sangh of which he was himself the product.

### What Happened to Kashmir After All? – The Last Discourse

Only twenty-four hours before his death, Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi talked to two young journalists from Bangalore whom he had met for the first time. They had come to see him, to know about him and to hear from him about his views on Kashmir. They were eager to know the reasons that communalized the mindset of an average Kashmiri Muslim, leading to the ethnic cleansing of Kashmiri Hindus. While being face to face with these young journalists, Pandit Amarnath said that the partition of India into two nations was based on the criterion that the Muslims in the Army whose homes were in Pakistan be allotted to the Pakistan Army, and the Hindus whose homes were in India be allotted to the Indian Army. Those Muslims whose homes were in India and those Hindus whose homes were in Pakistan were given the option to join the Armies of their choice. However, this criterion was not followed in the case of Poonch and Mirpuri Muslims of the Jammu region serving in the undivided army. They were allotted to the Pakistan Army without a choice, even before the accession of Jammu & Kashmir. This action encouraged Pakistan-sponsored rebellion in Poonch. Locals of Poonch were incited by Pakistan to rise in revolt against Maharaja Hari Singh as his armed force was too minimal to stop the revolt. On October 22, 1947, a Tribal Lashkar numbering not less than 500, under the command of Hayat Khan, a local leader and Shri Rashid Anwar, an officer in the Pakistan Army under the supervision of Colonel Akbar Khan, crossed the Dummel Bridge to enter the Indian territory where they were joined by the Muslims of Poonch and Mirpur who were from the 4<sup>th</sup> J&K Infantry. They killed their Dogra comrades in a deep sleep in their barracks. The town of Muzaffarabad was ransacked, and these raiders moved along the



Jhelum valley. Only two hundred soldiers of Maharaja Hari Singh could, at the most, delay the onward march of the raiders at Uri but not stop it. The chief of the state forces who was leading his men fell wounded at Buniyar. The Hindus in Maharaja's police force were scattered throughout the state, including Gilgit and Baltistan. They resisted the onward march of the barbarians of Pakistan. This was never highlighted to date. A mention of Pandit Amar Nath Muthoo, Pandit Shambu Nath Mattoo and many others who were all Kashmiri Pandits posted as Sub Inspectors of Police in Sukardu, Muzaffarabad and Baltistan, respectively, is necessary because they fought the enemy till their brutal end. At least 127 police constables laid down their lives in these areas, which were all Kashmiri Pandits who could have otherwise left their places of postings in time to go to their homes in Srinagar and other towns for their safety.

Now the Maharaja got demoralized and asked for military help from India but did not make any mention to the authorities for Kashmir's accession with India. Defence committee meetings were held in Delhi. Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, who was displeased with Maharaja Hari Singh, was not interested in helping the Maharaja, but Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah's friendship with Nehru ji made him fight the Pakistani raiders. Nehru ji was thus eager to see that the Indian Army should move to Kashmir to stop Pakistan's advances in J&K. However, Lord Mountbatten, then Governor-General of India, did not agree to send Army to Kashmir unless the Maharaja agreed to fully accede with India. He was aware of the fact that the Maharaja was not in favour of acceding with India or with Pakistan. In their hearts, Mountbatten and the British army were interested in seeing Srinagar's fall to Pakistani Tribals.

On October 25, 1947, Sardar Patel sent Shri V.P. Menon and Colonel Manekshaw to Maharaja Hari Singh to get his signatures on the instrument of accession, which reached New Delhi on the 26<sup>th</sup> of October. The Indian Army could have made it up to Muzaffarabad. Still, the British officers of the Indian army ordered a diversion for relief of Poonch, where a sizable number of the state forces were besieged by Pakistan, causing an impediment in the forward



march of the Indian Army to Muzaffarabad even though the Indian Army had landed at Srinagar Airport. Meanwhile, Pakistan forces sent fresh tribals to defend Muzaffarabad, and General Cariappa took over as the Chief of the Army Staff of India, and the battle continued. The Indian Army was poised to make the Pak army return and get hold of the entire state. Pandit Nehru declared a unilateral ceasefire without even consulting the Chief of the Army Staff.

### Importance of P.O.K.

While explaining the reasons behind Pakistan's occupation of a part of Kashmir, Pandit Vaishnavi cited why Pak-occupied Kashmir was important for India even today. He said that the territory of occupied Kashmir to the west of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir was earlier a part of the former princely state of Jammu & Kashmir but ceased to be a part of it as a result of the 1947 Pakistan Kabali raid. Again, the territory shares borders with Gilgit, referred to by the United Nations organization as Pak-administered Kashmir. The territory also borders with Punjab province of the west. The so-called Azad Kashmir (P.O.K) is in the east, separated from the Indian state of J&K by the line of control. Considering the sensitive geographical nature of Gilgit and Baltistan concerning its security, India has been opposing Pakistan's plan of granting the status of a province to this region since 1947, thereby creating bitterness between India and Pakistan. After Pakistan asserted its total control over P.O.K., Pakistan continues to make trouble for the Indian state of J&K. Therefore, India is bound to keep its pressure on Pakistan in P.O.K., including Gilgit & Baltistan.

### Communal Trouble – 1931 & Aftermath

After narrating the historical background connected with the Kashmir issue, Pandit Vaishnavi opened his mind before the journalists explaining to them the other factors that could be called the fountainhead of the communal



trouble that started brewing in Kashmir. He said that in June 1931, a Muslim fanatic named Abdul Qadir started working as a cook in the company of a European Military officer. In the meantime, protest meetings were held by the local Muslims in Srinagar city in mosques and the downtown area, heavily populated by Muslims. The protest meetings aimed at opposing Maharaja Hari Singh, the ruler of the state. These meetings were usually organized by the reading room parties whose members were some educated members of the Muslim Majority community, including Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah. One of its meetings was held on 21<sup>st</sup> June 1931 in the Khankahi Mohalla area in Srinagar. After some of the speakers delivered a speech, Abdul Qadir suddenly appeared on the scene and started delivering a fiery speech that was highly communal and seditious. He even pointed fingers towards the palace of Maharaja Hari Singh, telling people to raze it to the ground. He was arrested by the police under the charges of sedition. His trial began in the session court on 5<sup>th</sup> July 1931, and the mob stood in the court premises raising slogans against the regime and in favour of Abdul Qadir, creating hurdles in the court proceedings. The mob demanded the withdrawal of the case against Abdul Qadir, chanting religious slogans to make the atmosphere communal. It was thus decided to hold the next hearing in central jail Srinagar. On the 13<sup>th</sup> of July 1931, the trial started in the central jail. Outside the jail, the mob started raising slogans against Maharaja and in favour of Abdul Qadir, and some people also managed to enter the jail premises and release some of the prisoners. The situation was getting out of control, and as a result, the magistrate issued an order to fire. In this firing, 21 people were killed and 60 injured. The mob got infuriated with the deaths. They kept the dead bodies on their shoulders and marched on the streets in the form of a procession. The angry mob started killing, looting, plundering and destroying the property of the minority community of Hindus. Many people from the Hindu community were killed, and many were injured. Hundreds of their shops were looted and gutted in a fire. At Vicharnag, ten kilometers away from Srinagar city, a good number of Hindus were targeted. The dead bodies of Muslims were taken to Jama Masjid in a procession, where they were buried the next day. The miscreants again



started violence in other parts of the city, reaching Badgam, where the minority community (Hindus) was injured and harassed by raising communal slogans. Protesters were chased by the police, and in the stampede, a few Hindus who were passing by the city area called Ali Kadal drowned in the nearby river. The fire of communalism did not stop. It went up to Bimler and Mirpur, situated in Pak-occupied Kashmir and Rajouri in Jammu province. The day of 13<sup>th</sup> July is thus observed by a large section of the Muslim community as Martyr's Day, whereas the Hindus of Jammu and Kashmir call it Black Day. It was made known to the journalists by Pandit Vaishnavi that Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah was the person under whose leadership the Muslim movement against Maharaja Hari Singh was initiated. He later renamed the Muslim Conference his party as National Conference. Later Sheikh Abdullah adopted a secular posture by saying that he was opposed to going the Pakistani way. He raised the slogan of Hindu-Muslim-Sikh unity, but after coming to power, he maintained his separatist overtones by calling himself the Prime minister or Sadr-e- Riyasat and adopting the state flag with a separate constituent assembly and adopting the state flag with a separate constitution. As the ruler of the state, he had the hidden agenda of belittling Hindus by ignoring them in state services and taking away Hindu land under his progressive slogan "land to tillers". The Praja Parishad of Jammu started a historical movement to expose Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah in 1949. Fifteen people sacrificed their lives, and slogans were created which were on the lips of everyone in Jammu "down with two flags and two heads." Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah tried to woo the leader behind the nationalist movement, Pandit Prem Nath Dogra but he failed to do so. Dr Shyamaprasad Mukherji wanted to talk to Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah in Srinagar but could not do so. He died under mysterious conditions in Srinagar, Kashmir. The "Jail Bharo Andolan" started in the country, and the movement was handled by the Bhartiya Jana Sangh. Sheikh Abdullah was exposed by his speeches wherein he expressed his wish that Kashmir be set free, and that too with America's help. Thus, it opened Nehru's eyes and Sheikh Abdullah was arrested and jailed in southern India for 11 years. Shri Bakshi Gulam Mohammad took charge and ruled without any extra-territorial



loyalties for about ten years. In any case, the separatist movement was carried on by the followers of Sheikh under the organization called the Plebiscite Front, carrying anti-India slogans. The other group of Muslims, called the Awami Action Committee, headed by Mirwaiz Maulana Farooq, also carried ahead the separatist movement in his way. The Plebiscite Front demanding independent Kashmir and Awami Action Committee demanding Kashmir's accession with Pakistan kept Kashmir on the boil. These groups continued to fan the separatist sentiments of the state's Muslims, enabling Kashmir to cease being a part of India. In these circumstances, the pro-India population, which was mostly the non – Muslim community, was being harassed by raising anti –India slogans and by burning down their religious places continuously for decades. This was followed by Pakistan-sponsored terrorism in 1990, which led to the mass exodus of Hindus from the Kashmir Valley.

His meeting with the journalists ended at 6.50 pm at his residence in Boota Nagar, Room number TRT -K4, in the quarters which were allotted to the displaced Kashmiri Pandits by the government. His last words to the journalists were, "The tragedy is that the Kashmiri Pandit community is scattered and away from its roots." Then a few drops of tears trickled down his eyes, and the two journalists were shocked to see this. On the following day, July 1, 2012, Pandit Vaishnavi departed on his final journey at 4 pm after a day of public meetings and routine activities.

### The Rise of the Jamaatis

The international-level conferences in the early 1980s in Kashmir organized by the two Islamic fundamentalist organizations Ahl-i-Hadith J & K and Jamaat-e-Islami J & K should never be ignored while analyzing the cause of militant insurgency in the state that commenced from the late 1980s. These conferences, as realized later, were held with the objective of Islamizing the state and exposing the Muslim youth to transnational Jihad, with moral and financial support from Pakistan. This was also the time when the youth wing



of the two organizations, particularly that of Jamaat – e – Islami and the Islamic Jamaat-e-Tulba, became active and worked for the promotion of the Deobandi Islam in Kashmir besides imparting physical training to Kashmiri Muslim youth in hidden locations, in the forests and ravines around Hari Parvat.

Why did it all happen, and had the movement already started while remaining unnoticed? The pioneer of Muslim Fundamentalism in Kashmir, Syed Alishah Geelani, Jamaat-e Islami rukun and a propagator of the philosophy “IKAMAI -E-DIN” (Single religion and Nizam- e- Mustafa administration of the prophet) strived hard with the clandestine support from Ahl-i-Hadith J&K and Pakistan since the 1960s but failed in his mission on account of the presence of strong political leadership in the state and a lack of support from the Muslim majority community who believed in Hanfi ( moderate) and Sufi Islam.

In addition to this, two other significant developments in the subcontinent brought together Syed Alishah Geelani and other like-minded people. These developments included Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah returning to power in the state in February 1975 and the execution of Z A Bhutto in Pakistan in April 1979. Kashmiri Muslims gave vent to their anti-Jamaat feelings by ransacking infrastructure at the disposal of the Jamaat and by torturing its supporters. Therefore, the Jamaati fundamentalists lay low, went underground and were advised by their masters in Pakistan to wait for an opportune time while keeping their machinery greased. That opportune time for them came with the onset of political instability in the state, particularly after the demise of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah in 1982 and after G. M. Shah replaced Dr. Farooq Abdullah as the new Chief Minister of the state. The underground cadre of Jamaat was emboldened to come over ground and instigate the Muslim majority against the state’s political leadership by spreading rumours that the Sheikh had betrayed Kashmiris by entering into an accord with then Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi. It worked, as there appeared none to fill the political vacuum.



Now that the Taliban has captured Afghanistan, India needs to have a more strategic approach towards this development. Here we are reminded of a war in the offing called Khurasan, believed to be based on the prophecy, which could involve Central Asian countries, namely Iran, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and even Afghanistan, which could be the centre of this war. We also need to concentrate on the latest narrative of Jihadis called "sons of the soil". It means that the jihadis need not be borrowed from the neighbouring countries instead, they should be grown from within the country where terror is to be unleashed in the name of Jihad. This type of Jihad has been in vogue in Jammu and Kashmir since 2001. Local indoctrination is being used to promote the sons of the soil as jihadis. In India, this role is being played by the Deoband Tabligi Jamaat, Ahl-i-Hadith combine. What is worrying for the average Indian is the role of communists inside the country who have been hobnobbing with the Jihadis since the end of the nineteenth century. There is every apprehension that the communists and jihadis could act as stooges of China, Pakistan and the Taliban, along with the Haqqani Network-Al Qaeda nexus in the near future.



## Chapter—10

### Awakening Call and the Renaissance

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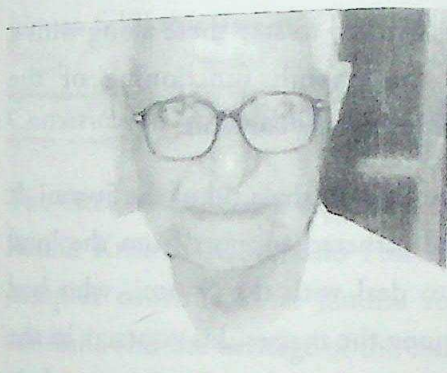
#### Cultural Revival – A Reality

The modest voice of Kashmiri Pandits, a devoted leader and an excellent man, Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi had an everlasting love for the land of his ancestors and valued its culture. Having an artistic background, he had an appreciation for the native artists, poets, writers and scholars who promoted art, literature and philosophy worldwide. He believed that the world was interested in knowing the cultural heritage of India and that any such study should have begun from Kashmir. Pandit Vaishnavi's ambition was that the writers should move forward to play their role in connecting the displaced with the heritage that was diminishing due to displacement.

In the mid-1940s, Pandit Vaishnavi had been associated with theatre in Kashmir with Pandit Kashinath Bhan, a theatre director of name and fame. For a short period, he was also associated with Motilal Kemu and Shyamlal Dhar Bahar, known dramatists of Kashmir. He was proud of being a student of famous art teachers, namely Pandit Shiv Ji Kaul and Satlal Kampassi. He was a talented painter and had self-made paintings of Dr Hedgewar, Shri Golwalkar and his own father and brother in his drawing room at his residence in Chattabal in Srinagar, which he left behind after the exodus.



He was all praise for a world-renowned Kashmiri sculptor Mr. Rajinder Tickoo, and renowned artists such as Mr. Gokul Dembi and Mr. Veer Munshi, who earned names and fame in their respective fields. He also played an important role in the making of the young Kashmiri artist Mr. Veer Ji Sumbly, who has now earned the name of being a competent set designer on stage. He continued to inspire and encourage the creative people within the community to initiate activities that would keep their culture alive, saving it from extinction as an aftermath of the exodus.



Mr. Kashinath Bagwaan



In Haridwar with Shri Heeralal Chatta & C L Bhat

### Tracing the Heritage

A Kashmiri Dharamshala constructed by Kashmiri Hindus some 105 years ago in Haridwar, located near Ganga Sabha, was looked after by Ghanshyam, but the management of the dharamshala remained unattended.

A committee was formed under the presidentship of Amarnath Vaishnavi, whose members were Heeralal Chatta, Jagan Nath Sagar, Arjan Nath Bhat, Kashinath Bagwaan and Chamanlal Bhat. Later a trust was constituted for managing its affairs, and Kashinath Bagwaan was elected its president. The trust, which is functional even today, is known as "All Kashmiri Pandit Welfare Society Haridwar". Heeralal Chatta was its general secretary, and Arjan Nath Bhat and Jagan Nath Sagar were elected its treasurer and secretary, respectively.



Chaman Lal Bhat became its organizer, and Niranjan Nath and Ghanshyam were its members. The trust started repair work and the construction of more rooms on the Dharamshala premises. Amarnath Vaishnavi decided to personally attend and be in Haridwar for some time to find ways and means to improve the conditions for the smooth running of the affairs of the Dharamshala. ASKPC got a clue from a nearby location at Haridwar that another dharamshala, namely "Gauri Shankar Dharamshala", which was constructed by Baljee Kaul, a Kashmiri Pandit Brahmin almost 100 years ago, was also not in good shape. Again, the ASKPC started its efforts to restore this Dharamshala. Swami Amritanand Dev was allowed to stay there along with a Kashmiri Pandit boy, Anup Kaul, for the smooth functioning of the Dharamshala. However, the Swami turned out to be a conman.

It was Amarnath's personal efforts to get the Dharamshala rid of the Swami. It was pretty difficult to fight him as he had gathered support from the local goons. Amarnath exercised his patience to deal with the Swami, who had become a goon. Amarnath's popularity among the masses, his contacts in the higher echelons of the government and his zeal to free the Dharamshala enabled this to happen. Thereafter the trust got complete control of the Dharamshala under the presidentship of Pandit Amarnath. The Dharamshala subsequently flourished and provided services to the pilgrims even today. However, Gaurishankar Dharamshala could not be freed due to some legal formalities which could not be met.

### Radio Sharda – A Kashmiri Language Channel Inaugurated

Shri Ramesh Hangloo's ambition was to keep the Kashmiri language alive, for which he wished to start a radio channel. He had set up Peer Panchal cultural organization in Jammu immediately after the exodus and, with the support of Manoj Jad, Kuldeep Sapru and Rajesh Khar, performed a series of cultural programs in Jammu. He also participated in various conferences and events with Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, organised to solve the community's woes. In



2011, Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi supported Mr Hangloo by helping him acquire the infrastructure for setting up the facility to launch FM channel 90.4 at Buta Nagar, where Kashmiri Pandit tenements were situated. He offered the top floor of the ASKPC office for the purpose. This is how Radio Sharda came into existence. The inaugural function was attended, among others, by Director Door Darshan Jammu and Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi. Pandit Vaishnavi called it a historical event. Ramesh Hangloo, while addressing the gathering, said with tears in his eyes that his dream had come true. On this occasion, he thanked Mr. Chaman Lal Kaul, a renowned author, for helping him to fulfil this dream.

### Construction of the Building to House the ASKPC Office

The three office bearers of ASKPC Sheetal Nath, namely Amarnath Vaishnavi, Radha Krishan Raina, and Heeralal Chatta, expressed the need to have a complex constructed at Jammu so that all the activities of ASKPC could continue and the heritage of the community could be preserved. A meeting of the executive committee of ASKPC was held in Jammu in April 2009, and a resolution was passed to go ahead with the plan of constructing the building. The decision was taken after considering the financial and other aspects that needed immediate attention before the purchase of land and the start of construction work. The three office bearers were given full powers to proceed with the dream project. Amarnath with his team immediately sprang into action, and within a year, a piece of land was purchased at Durga Nagar Jammu and the construction work was started without any further delay. Amarnath started a campaign to contact community members and the main leadership of Jammuites to receive assistance for completing his dream project. This worked well, and public donations started coming in from the Kashmiri Pandit community and the locals of Jammu in cash and kind. Amarnath believed that Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya inspired him to expedite his efforts of contacting all types of people, whether in the construction business or any other profession, to accomplish this task. Mr. Vijay Bakaya, a counsellor in the



legislative council of the state legislature of J & K, helped grant government funds meant for social welfare schemes. It took two years to complete more than half of the construction work. At the end of June 2012, when Amarnath returned to Jammu from Delhi after undergoing his medical treatment, he rushed to see the building, and he was thrilled to see the construction nearing completion. He had been in Delhi with his family since January 2012 for medical treatment.

### Launching of Martand – The Community Newspaper

On 24<sup>th</sup> August 2005, his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi announced before the audience that the weekly newspaper “Martand,” which represented the views of the Kashmiri Pandit community and had not been published due to some unforeseen reasons, would be started as a monthly newspaper. Raj Bhat, the nephew of Pandit Kashyap Bandhu, was also present on this occasion, and he offered a cheque of Rupees one lakh to Pandit Vaishnavi as a donation to restart the newspaper.

After framing a body of meaningful persons to take care of the publication of the newspaper on a regular basis, an appeal was made to the masses to donate generously to ensure that the publication of the newspaper and its proper circulation could no longer be hindered.

ASKPC started deliberating with various social organizations involving them to widen the horizon of the campaign in favour of regular circulation and increasing its readership. ASKPC finally took two years to constitute a body that could take up the publication of the newspaper. The constituted body was headed by the president of ASKPC, Amarnath Vaishnavi, and it included 12 members these were Professor TN Shala, Shibani Krishan Khaibri, Bansilal Handoo, DN Kissoo, Vijay Kumar Kashkari, Manmohan Kaul, Ramakrishna Bhat, Bansilal Bhat, Shyam Lal Raina, R K Wangnu, Bhushanlal and Lakshman Rivoo. This body formed the editorial board with Amarnath Vaishnavi as the



editor-in Chief and Professor Shala as the Editor, Vijay Kumar Kashkari as the circulation manager and Bansilal Handoo as the treasurer. Radha Krishan Raina and Hira Lal Chatta were members of the Editorial board.

On both these occasions, Pandit Amarnath said, "We have travelled a long way since Kashyap Bandhu's time. He had edited the Martand newspaper in the Urdu language in Kashmir. His priorities were different from ours. The Kashmiri Pandit community, in its present state of diaspora wilderness, facing a lack of sustained sources of funds, has to muster the courage to be united within its rank and file. The strength lies in oneness, and the community stands extirpated from its land since 1990. The mass exodus of such magnitude inflicted on this community is unheard of in the secular democracy of India. Martand newspaper is the voice of the Pandit community, which highlights the social, political and economic issues confronting the community. Our real regret is that for more than half a century after independence, India continued to vainly project the existence of a minuscule Pandit community in a predominantly Muslim majority state as a secular profile. This profile flung into the face of her critics and adversaries. When the ethnic cleansing of Pandits took place, our stage managers hid behind the curtain and distanced themselves from us. It may be noted here that the much-acclaimed biography of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, "Atishe Chinar", labelled Kashmiri Pandits as spies of India." Amarnath concluded by saying that while keeping these facts in view, launching Martand as a community voice is our priority.

In August 1982, the revival of Martand, a fortnightly and later a weekly, and setting up various committees was the primary agenda of the first-ever brainstorming session of ASKPC. It was also decided that Martand would be published in English instead of Urdu. From then onwards, Martand was continuously published in the English language.

It was on August 17, 2007, when Martand, a monthly English newspaper, was released in Jammu and later in New Delhi. However, the circulation of the



weekly Martand, edited by Shri SK Khaibri from 2009 onwards, ended in June 2012 due to the paucity of funds.



Launch of Martand with Kundan Kashmiri (2009)

Gratitude to people who accompanied him in all endeavours

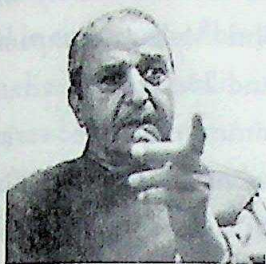


With Shri H.L. Chatta & Shri RK Raina

Shri Heeralal Chatta

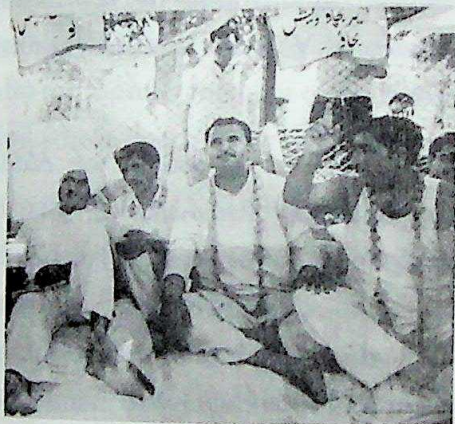
Contributions of those noble souls need to be brought to light who formed part of a mission that Amarnath Vaishnavi carried out during his lifetime and more so in exile after the exodus from the valley. The mission was to give the minority Hindu community of Kashmir its rightful place, coupled with a life of dignity and safety.



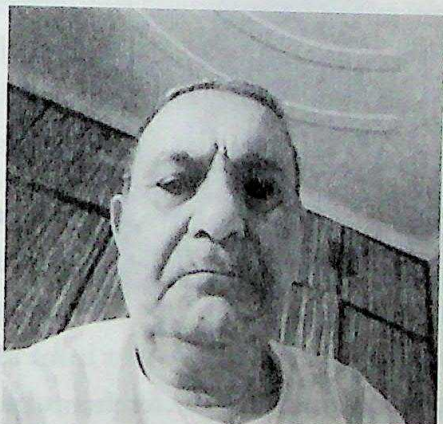


Shri Motilal Malla

Motilal Malla is one among many RSS ideologues who was inspired by the social service concept of the RSS and by the dedication of Vaishnavi, with whom he was associated right from the early 1960s when Vaishnavi was posted as a government teacher in North Kashmir. The organization to which both were attached was the Vivekananda Society. Shri Motilal Malla, who knew how to read the “Lok Manas”, never bothered where and with whom he sat.



With M.L. Malla &amp; H.L. Chatta at protest

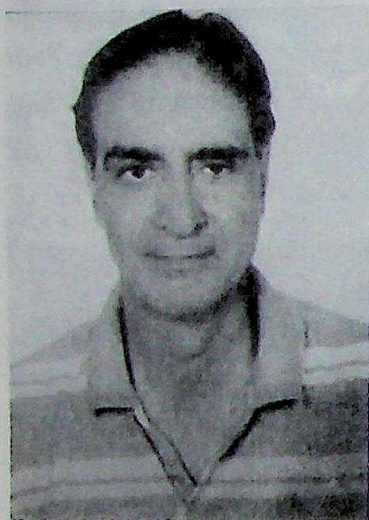


Shri Harjilal Jad

He had imbibed from Vaishnavi the quality of mingling with everyone with the only aim to know more and more about the people in trouble and to work to eradicate the problems they were facing. Mr. Malla, along with Shri Harji Lal Jad, Shri Heeralal Chatta, Shri D.P Koul and Shri Pushkar Nath Karneil, jumped into the fray right since 1990 as active members of ASKPC to reach every nook and corner of Jammu and also to the various states of the country as a team. Amarnath Vaishnavi accompanied this entire group to meet Prime Minister of India V.P. Singh in January 1990 and the Prime Minister of India Shri Chandra Shekhar in 1991 to discuss the problems faced by the Kashmiri Hindu community in turmoil.



Shri Motilal Malla was among the few activists who worked closely with Vaishnavi to solve the problems on ground zero. Shri Malla accompanied Vaishnavi to the states of Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Haryana to arrange admissions for the displaced boys and the girls of the community in the various



Shri. Ashok Kumar Braroo

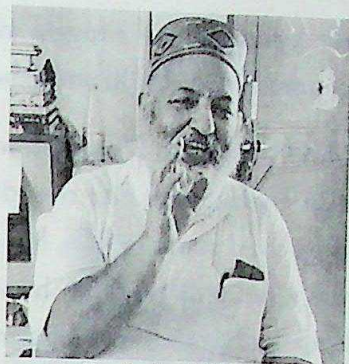
colleges with concessions and other facilities available to them. With the support of local RSS leadership, they addressed public meetings to make the public aware of the Kashmir row. He also participated in a protest rally at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi, which Amarnath Vaishnavi headed against the Agra summit.

Shri Ashok Braroo, an activist of Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad, who had associated himself with Pandit Amarnath since the famous Kashmiri Pandit agitation of 1967, in which he participated as a young

activist, remained at the forefront during the period of exile by remaining an active member of the All State Kashmiri Pandit Conference (Sheetal Nath) at Jammu. He had the experience of being an underground activist during the emergency period in 1975. During his tenure as a central government employee, he also worked as a missionary in Kalyan Ashrams when he was posted in Nagaland, Mizoram and Shillong. In 1992 he wrote a book on the exodus of the Kashmiri Hindus entitled "Genocide in Kashmir", detailing the killings and atrocities committed by the militants in Kashmir. He remained engrossed in exile to work for the exiled Hindus in Jammu, strengthening the hands of Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi. He also served as the vice president of the Kashmiri Pandit Sabha at Jammu.



Dr Susheel Wattal is a scientist by profession, and in the prime of his youth, he actively served the Kashmiri Pandit community in distress. Inspired by Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, Dr. Susheel Wattal worked with him to mitigate the sufferings of the displaced community by arranging accommodation in tents and dharmshalas during the period of exile in Jammu. Dr. Wattal always accompanied Pandit



Dr. Susheel Wattal

Amarnath to meet the personalities and other administrators who were involved in rehabilitating the displaced Hindus from Kashmir. Dr. Wattal is also the founder member of the Kheer Bhavani Trust Jammu and is a dedicated and whole-time activist of Bhagavan Gopi Nath Ji Ashram Jammu.

Pandit Amarnath as a social activist, never got tired. Many people would see him travelling in buses in the night to other states, accompanying young girls and boys to various educational institutions who were seeking admissions in Haryana, Punjab and Maharashtra. When asked as to why he was working even in old age, he replied that it was his headgear that could come to the rescue of the younger generation of Kashmiri Pandits. He also said that his efforts would enable the youngsters to inherit some of the heritage of Kashmir.

There are many more men of eminence and leading social activists of the community whose names cannot be forgotten. These men include Shri Makhanlal Aima, Shri Omkarnath Trisal, Dr Gopi Krishan Muju, Shri D.N. Kisu, Shri Pyareylal Koul Badgami and Shri Vijay Kumar Kashkari. Similarly, the role played by some of the young



Shri Hridaynath

Delhi-based activists of the community, which include Shri Vijay Kumar Kashkari, Shri Utpal Koul, Dr Ramesh Raina, Shri Ramesh Manwati, Shri Rajinder Premi, Shri Anupam Koul and Shri Ajay Bharti made

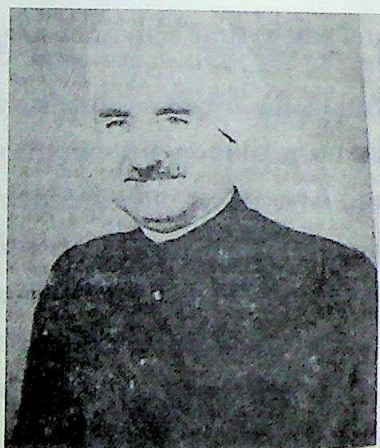


the community's struggle vibrant, strengthening the cultural roots of the community in Delhi and other states.

Shri Hridaynath Bhat, who was jailed with him during the emergency of 1975, also worked with him relentlessly as a member of Sahayata Samiti. Amarnath ji received support from him and his family till his last breath as he stayed in the same premises with him in Jammu to work for the community. Pandit Amarnath would intermittently travel to Delhi to meet his family, but most of his time was spent in Jammu.

### The Final Journey

Some people & objects symbolize firmness, longevity and immortality, and they exist at all times so that people can seek solace from them. Such was the persona of Amarnath Vaishnavi. It was July 1, 2012, and Pandit Vaishnavi went about his daily chores and attended a public meeting. He returned home in the afternoon to relax. AT 4 PM, he got up, and as he walked a few steps, he fell down. He was taken to the hospital, but he passed away at 87 while on the way to the hospital. 'Jaikara' had always inspired the masses, and that day also, there was an ocean of people bidding goodbye to his physical form. He is survived by his family of nephews and nieces, his adopted son and grandchildren for whom he was a loving father, grandfather and great-grandfather. Great men & women leave an indelible impact on the lives of the human population, which also shows up in future generations. They remain immortal in a different form. They never die.



Amarnath Vaishnavi



## Photo Gallery



With Family



With Mr. Shivraj Chouhan, Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh

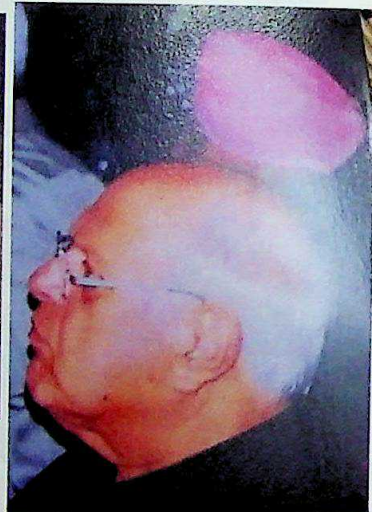




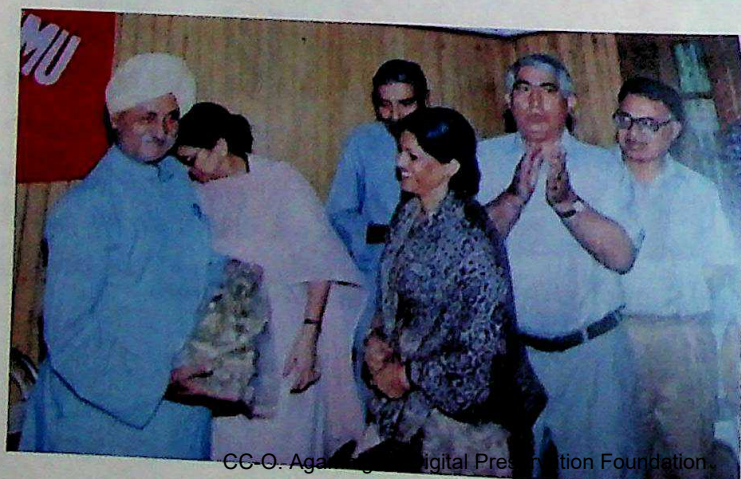
Addressing press reporters



Presenting  
Ganesh Idol to  
renowned Singer  
Kailash Mehra ji



(Above) Honouring CL Gupta for his election  
victory; (right) At a conference with Dr Farooq  
Abdullah







Protest March at India Gate.

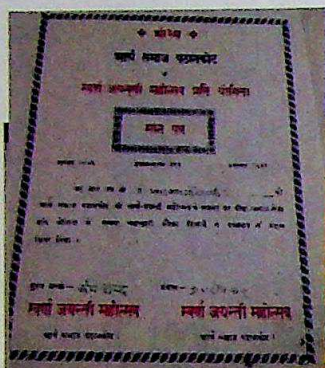


With Dr Ved Gai at a book release function



With Sh Vijay Bakaya (Ex Chief Secretary) & Sh Raman Bhalla (Ex-Minister Rehabilitation & Relief)





Honoured for social work by  
Arya Samaj Pathankot

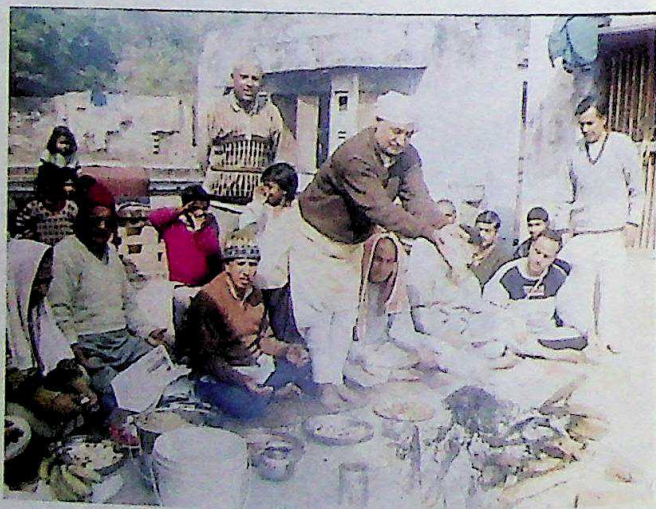


His last residence in Butanagar Jammu

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His room in Jammu, Butanagar  
migrant camp

Performing Yagya in  
Haridwar







With Mr. Vijay Bakaya, Mr. Kundan Kashmiri & Mr. H.L. Chatta



Organizing  
Samoochik  
Yagnopavit

Performing  
Shivratri Puja  
at home







With eminent poets and writers



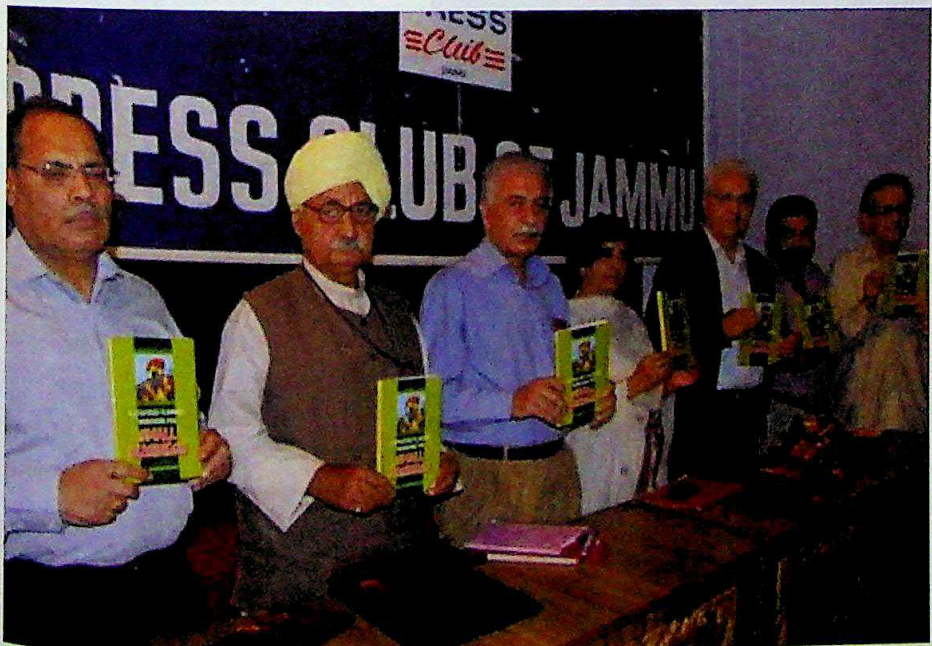
Leading a public protest





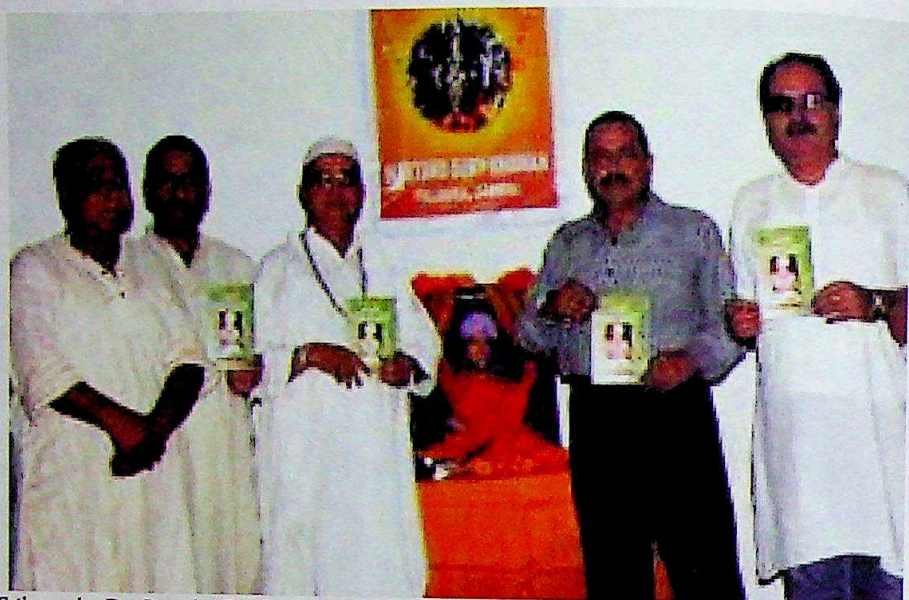


Release of Jaikara – A documentary on his life by Prof. Virender Rawal ( Vyeth). In the picture: Dr. Jitendra Singh, Balkrishan Sanyasi, Vijay Bakaya, Virender Rawal, Swami Kumar ji, Mori Koul, Dr Agnishekhar & others.



Attending a Book Release Function



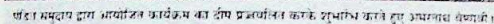


Tributes by Dr. Jitender Singh, Dr. Agnishekhar, H.L. Chatta, Swami Kumar ji and Ashwani Chhangoo.



Mr. Bharat Bhushan Bhat and his companions immersing the last remains of Pandit Vaishnavi





कार्यक्रम

- वैष्णवी को भगवत के प्रजापति का सम्मान
- दो पुस्तकों का विधायन किया गया

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**Executive Correspondent**      **Describing the role of ASKPC**

### Executive Compensation

**JAMMU, Aug 20** AM State Kashmiri Pandit Conference (ASKPC)'s president, Amar Nath Vaidya was today equated with Lata Lalpat Rai, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah and Yashwantrao Chavan by the speaker who took part in celebrating his 80th birthday today where he was later declared as Father of the Kashmiri Pandit Community.

The day has also been dedicated to the Kashner Family Foundation as solidarity day. Mr. Kashner was honored with this honor for his 65 year long services to the community.

K. Gopal, Mayor Jam  
my Municipal Corporation  
was the chief guest on the  
occasion, who in his address  
said that the role of Mr  
Vaidhyanath was in no way  
less for the K.P.s in way of  
Yash Arati for Palestin-  
ians. He, while recalling  
Vaidhyanath's role in the Pro-  
Pa Parish Movement, said  
that despite his success with  
the contribution of leaders  
Mr Vaidhyanath.

expressing the hope that Mr. Yashwanth will continue to guide the community in future too. Deputy Mayor, Mrs. Hans Blooria urged the Kashmiri Pandit organiza-

to work jointly for

teering Vaishnavi a legend, Dr Aphsahadkhar, convenor Panun Kashmir said he is the symbol of Kashmiri Pandita struggle.

BJP general secretary Ashok Khajuria said it was unfortunate for this country that patriotic people are made to pay price for their loyalty. Describing Vaishnavi as the Lala Lajpat Rai of Kashmiri Pandita, Ashwini Chozagoo of Panun Kashmir Movement said he is the inspiration for us all. "The slogan of homeland become a mantra for community after Mr Vaishnavi strangled it".

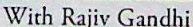
Recalling the achievements of ASKPC chief, he described him the master of political theatre of KPs who will not leave the community disappointed. "Vaishtuvi has some status in KP Samaj as Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah has in Muslim Community of Kashmir", he added.

Describing the role of ASKPC. A

Dr R. L. Bhat senior vice president JKVM alleged that the nationalist elements in JKK have been subjected to arrest since 1947.

The contribution of Mr Vaishnavi were also recalled by S I. Koul of Secular Youth Front, Satish Razdan and B L. Rana from Porthoo Camp, Laisi, in his address Mr Vaishnavi said it is the historical day for Kashmiri Pandits as a leader has been felicitated in his life time for the first time. He reiterated the demand for separate state within Valley for KPs on the lines of quod-erpolation of the state as passed in KP Representative Assembly.

A paper on the life and struggle of Mr. Vaidyanath was also read on the occasion.



DAILY EXCLUSOR, JAMMU

Excelsior Correspondent

JAMMU, July 6: Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha, Arun Jaitley today visited the residence of late RSS veteran and KP leader Amarnath Vaishnavi at TKT Buta Nagar to express his condolences to the bereaved family.

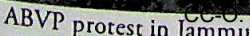
Mr Jaitley was accompanied with BJP state president Shamsher Singh Manhas, organizational general secretary of Party Ashok Kaul, MLA, Ashok Chajuria and Party National Executive Member and chief spokesman of the state, Dr Iendra Singh.

Mr Jaitley while conveying  
condolences to the family of  
Vaishnavi described him a  
tal Preservation Foundat  
increasing role in Praja Parishad

movement and subsequent pro national movements in the state for J&K's total integration with Indian Union.

He said late leader served the people of state selflessly and left an example for others to follow. He said Vaishnavi Ji was in real sense a dedicated Swayamsevak who never thought of his own interests. It is strange that a person serving the nation for over six decades has no house to live and was living in a rented accommodation, he added.

He said though mass exodus perturbed him a lot but he continued to work for the betterment of the community and it was due to his tireless efforts that some BJP led state governments agreed to reserve seats in professional colleges for displaced students.



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Jammu



No. MINREY/201  
MINISTER  
NEW AND RENEWABLE ENERGY  
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

July 2, 2012

Dear Shri Vaishnavi,

I am deeply grieved to learn of the sad news of the passing away of Shri Amar Nath Vaishnavi, President of All Kashmiri Pandit Conference.

2. I have known Shri Vaishnavi as a mass leader and a freedom fighter with a long and rich experience in Public life. A secular minded person who worked for mutual brotherhood and communal harmony. Shri Vaishnavi will be remembered for his untiring efforts in supporting the cause of Kashmiri Pandits for a peaceful life in Kashmir.

3. In his death, the community has lost a great leader whose contribution will be remembered for a long time to come.

4. I pray to the Almighty to grant peace to the departed soul and give strength to your entire family to bear the irreparable loss.

In grief,

Yours sincerely,

(Farooq Abdullah)

Shri Phanesh Vaishnavi  
S/o Late Shri Amar Nath Vaishnavi  
A-4 Migrants Quarters, Bata Nagar,  
P.O. Baramulla  
Baramulla, J.K.

Condolence letter by Dr Farooq Abdullah



## Reminiscence

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Amarnath Vaishnavi was a man of the masses who considered the whole society as his family. He interacted with myriads of people in his life, whether senior politicians and bureaucrats, close associates, general masses whom he helped, government officials or his family and friends. The most interesting part of these interactions is that most people have passionate memories of him which they hold close to their hearts, which reveals that despite being connected with lacs of people, he shared a personal bond with a majority of them, a trait which the tallest leaders in the world possessed. It should not surprise us that he was a popular leader adored by the masses. The biography of a towering personality like him would have been incomplete without including the accounts given by those people who loved him and held him in high esteem. We have made an attempt to document some of those in this book.



## Dr Jitendra Singh, Honourable Union Minister

### Vaishnavi, a Symbol of the Nationalistic School of Thought

It was God's will that Amarnath should do selfless service to society as he was born in 1925 when the RSS was founded by a great visionary, Dr Hedgewar. Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi presented an example of an alternative way of life. He worked in adverse circumstances to strengthen the nationalist forces in the state of Jammu and Kashmir throughout his life and is considered a symbol of the Nationalistic school of thought. At a time when Nationalist society in the state had been subjugated to develop a slavish mentality, Vaishnavi showed the path for leading life with dignity and self-respect without striking compromises for short time interests. He was an RSS ideologue and one of the founders of the Nationalist Movement in J&K State. Amarnath is a source of inspiration for the younger generation, and what is needed is to form a study centre devoted to research on the thoughts and works of Amarnath.

Amarnath served his community in distress and his nation up to his last breath. Whether it was setting his community members in camps after their mass exodus in 1989-90 and getting their day-to-day problems redressed or seeking admissions for their wards in professional colleges in other parts of the country, Amarnath played a leading role. No one can forget the role of Amarnath as Praja Parishad, Jan Sangh and BJP leader and his struggle on the call of the then Jan Sangh President Dr Shama Prasad Mukherji to break the permit system for which he was arrested along with other leaders of the state and the rest of the country. There are enormous examples of his honesty and selflessness as a social activist and a political leader. When his adopted son Ganesh Kumar Vaishnavi, Manager J&K Bank, was transferred to a remote locality Bani in Jammu Province in 1990 when militancy was at its peak in the J&K state and he had to travel at least 30 Kms on foot to reach that place in the rainy season to cross the rough terrain, he requested his father to use his good offices and get the transfer cancelled. Amarnath retorted and declined to do anything for



his son. Instead, he admonished Ganesh Kumar and told him to recall the sacrifices of Guru Govind Singh and never compromise for the self. The result was that Ganesh Kumar joined his services at Bani as per orders and remained at that outstation for six complete years instead of the one-year posting as per previous practice.

As a pioneer leader, he led the Sahayata Samiti along with Shri Vaid Vishno Dutt and other patriotic leaders of Jammu and Kashmir during the period of exile and worked tirelessly for the displaced people from Kashmir and Doda district, respectively. He also played a role as a social reformer and was a role model who led a very simple and austere life.

### Squadron Leader BL Sadhu (Ex-Army Serviceman & Social Activist)

#### Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi— A True Gandhian

Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi was rightly the Father of the KP Community. In his death, the community has lost a selfless and dedicated leader. Recalling my school days, I was initiated in the Sangh Shakha at Sheetal Nath by an equally renowned and tall leader of the community, Tikalal Taploo. Pandit Vaishnavi was so simple, loving, affable and yet resolute and a die-hard Kashmiri Pandit easily identified by the *dastaar* (turban) that he donned 24X7 on his head. He remained a hardcore patriot throughout his life and perhaps the only person who dedicated himself to the cause of the community. It wouldn't be out of place to say that Pandit Vaishnavi, a true Gandhian, lived and died for the community.

To this great stalwart, I bow my head in reverence. The best tribute we can pay to this great son of the soil is to emulate his example of renunciation, dedication and service to the community and mankind.



## AN Kaul Sahib (Journalist)

### ADIEU, Amarnath

The sudden demise of Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, also called Lalaji, the most popular and revered leader of Kashmiri Pandits, shocked and stunned our community not only in India but across the world. Amarnath, an epitome of grace and simplicity with an affectatious smile, personified the traditional Kashmiri Pandit with his head always adorned by a coloured *safa* (*turban*) and shining forehead sporting a *tilak*, with a sense of pride. A teacher by profession, his life was an example of simple living, high thinking and unalloyed transparency. A dedicated social activist of the community right from his younger days, Amarnath was at the forefront of every struggle or agitation launched by Kashmiri Pandits to secure their basic rights, dignity and honour and for an end to their unending discrimination and victimization, both before and post-exodus. During the 1967 Parmeshwari agitation, he provided dynamic leadership and direction to the people and virtually re-invented the inspiring cry of *Jai Kara Har Har Mahadev*. A stubborn nationalist, he will always be remembered for his pioneering role in the 1953 Praja Parishad movement in Jammu against Article 370 and the complete integration of the J&K State with India. When he was posted to Ladakh by the State Government, he did not fail to notice the plight and persecution of Buddhists. He spearheaded a successful movement for safeguarding the rights of that community, taking forward the mission launched by Pandit Shridharjoo Kaul Dulloo before him. During the post-exodus struggle of our community for survival in the most inhospitable and hostile climate and surroundings, Amarnath plunged himself whole hog in the service of the hapless people by moving around the ramshackle tents and tenements day in and day out to comfort his brethren in those crisis-ridden days of anxiety and bleak future, trying to wipe their unstoppable tears and exhorting them to face their ordeals unitedly with perseverance and fortitude. He was always at hand to lead delegation after delegation across the borders seeking basic facilities for the redressal



of the grievances of the displaced people and proper organization and distribution of relief. An excellent orator, he would establish an instant rapport with his audience everywhere and forcefully plead the cause of the community at his meetings with the highest government functionaries, political leaders, parliamentarians, legislators and bureaucrats. Whenever and wherever he went to represent his community, he was received with respect and honour. His last such important engagement, perhaps, was his testimony as a member of a representative KP delegation before the Parliamentary Standing Committee, where he is said to have made a deep impression. He went there despite his bad health following surgery, which he had undergone just two days earlier. This testifies to his grit and determination. Though he was wary of the differences of opinion occasionally erupting between different community organizations and individuals, he would never hesitate in attending their conferences and conclaves in Jammu, Delhi, or any part of the country, trying to use his influence and persuasive powers to bring them together for promoting common causes and interests. That is why he was respected and admired by one and all and rightfully acknowledged as the Father of the Community. An iconic figure like Amarnath is born once in a century or a generation. We bow our heads in reverence to his sacred memory, which we must keep alive in perpetuity. We can do so by following his ennobling ideals and principles like truthfulness, fearlessness and selfless service to our brethren. On this solemn occasion of offering our tearful homage to the departed leader, let us also resolve to unitedly and relentlessly carry forward our struggle to return to our homeland with honour and dignity. Again, to perpetuate Lalaji's memory, it would be befitting for every Kashmiri Pandit community congregation, conference or conclave, wherever held hereafter, to begin the proceedings with the stirring and inspiring slogan *Jai Kara Har Har Mahadev*. (Reproduced from the August issue of Naad with the prior permission of the author - Editor)



## Shiban Khaibri (Journalist)

### Pandit Vaishnavi in Perspective

I am reminded of a saying, "Become the kind of leader that people would follow voluntarily even if you had no title or position." The rustic, the simpleton, the non-egoistic and the like have been great people of all hues, and their claim to be from a modest background endears them to people. Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi was a person with a blend of rusticity and simplicity, yet he had the requisite courage and fearlessness to lead from the front and speak the bitter truth. Pandit Vaishnavi, as much as I could know him, stood as unique and shall always be remembered with reverence by our community.

In Pandit Vaishnavi, I found a complete unison of words and action, a congruence of servitude and simplicity, a mix of a missionary and a philanthropist and above all, an embodiment of keeping alive the rich and unique Kashmiri Pandit culture. Amarnath Vaishnavi practiced what he preached to the extent of how a Kashmiri Pandit, in the cultural sense, should look like by wearing the turban and sporting a tilak on the forehead and the two ear lobes. The hot and humid conditions outside the valley here in Jammu or wherever he travelled did not deter him from adhering to this basic tradition of a Kashmiri Pandit. On numerous occasions, Pandit Vaishnavi shared his anguish and concern with me about the Kashmiri language fading away and not being spoken so much by the younger generation.

It was his deep desire to have a newspaper published which could be the official organ of the All State Kashmiri Pandit Conference and be the voice of the Kashmiri Pandits. He revived the famous Urdu Daily "Martand", for which he incessantly worked, culminating in a fortnightly 12 paged "Martand" in English from Jammu. I, too, was associated with it for more than two years, looking after its front and editorial pages. He would extend whatever help he could and manage to ensure the paper saw the "light of day" twice a month. It,



however, struggled to come out of the hiccups of mismanagement, including other reasons and went into a slumber.

Referring to the famous 1967 KP agitation, which erupted with spontaneity and was the second most effective mass agitation after the 1931 Roti agitation, I chanced to gather scattered bits of that mass resistance of the community known as “Parmeshwari agitation” from the rich memoirs of Pandit Vaishnavi. I needed the information to enhance my knowledge about some most sensitive aspects of that agitation for a write-up. Pandit Vaishnavi felt pleased to share a lot with me as he knew about the events since he was one of the most vibrant and an infusible force behind that agitation of the masses which was against the denial of justice and fair play to the community by religious fundamentalist forces. Pandit Vaishnavi’s missionary role in the agitation cannot be underestimated, as also of other leaders of the community.

### M.L. Kak (Journalist)

#### Vaishnavi, An Honest and Truthful Rebel, Is No More

If there can be a term like an honest and clean rebel, A.N. Vaishnavi is the epitome of it. A rebel in the sense that he would not watch injustice, repression, or oppression like a mute spectator.

I was fortunate to meet him in Srinagar Central Jail in June 1975. It was a meeting between one detainee and the other. He had been detained by the Jammu and Kashmir Government, headed by Sheikh Abdullah, who had allowed the extension of the emergency promulgation to Jammu and Kashmir. Vaishnavi’s fault was that he was a volatile individual ready to fight injustice or any kind of raw deal. As a senior teacher posted in Ladakh, he had raised a banner of revolt against those elements that were engaged in converting the Buddhists to other religions.



I was a detainee from Haryana who managed to get transferred from Hisar Jail to Srinagar because of the intervention of Sheikh Abdullah. Sheikh Abdullah had phoned the then Haryana Chief Minister, Bansi Lal, who had settled a personal score with me by putting me in jail, to set me free because of my being innocent. But Bansi Lal had refused to revoke the detention order and instead agreed to transfer me to Srinagar Central jail.

When I dub Vaishnavi an honest rebel, I do so based on my maiden experience with him. In the Srinagar Central Jail, we had been provided with a servant, an Army deserter from UP, who would cook food for five people huddled in a big room. One day the servant refused to obey a constable's instructions and kept watching a television programme. The constable lodged a false charge against the servant with the jail superintendent, who ordered the flogging of the servant. The Army deserter, a tall and burly Jat from UP, was tied with ropes and lashed. When Vaishnavi heard about this, he lost his cool and protested so loudly that it sent shivers down the spine of the Jail authorities. The Jail superintendent requested me to persuade Vaishnavi to observe restraint. Before he could tone down his anger, the servant was sent back to "our room."

A.N. Vaishnavi was a simpleton. When he decided to contest the Assembly election in 1996, he was the only leader who refused a van from the Government and turned down an offer for security cover. While political nincompoops enjoyed Government security and a vehicle at their disposal, Vaishnavi was seen commuting long distances on foot.

Vaishnavi was a symbol of simple living and high thinking. Even as chief of the All-State Kashmir Pandit Conference for over two decades, Vaishnavi neither misused his status nor tried to seek any personal aggrandizement. Had he desired, he would have received big favours from the successive state Governments. He had limited desires. He has been rightly described by his close associates as a political saint. Kashmiri Pandits have more organizations than any community all over the world, and a majority of leaders of these



organizations prefer to work on a higher plank. It is not their job to help a displaced family if its cash incentive and free ration have been stopped. They aim to fight for the homeland and not for ration for the displaced people. But Amarnath Vaishnavi was of a different mould. He would not waste even a minute if some displaced people wanted his help in issuing ration cards or certificates that could help the displaced families' wards get admission to professional colleges in Mumbai and other states in the country. He was a man, rather a leader, of simple habits. He was a down-to-earth leader who was available to the unfortunate displaced people from Kashmir for 24 hours. He wore a smile, but his heart bled with the misfortune of the community he loved and cared for.

Kashmiri displaced people have been rendered orphans with the demise of A.N. Vaishnavi. I believe that a community is lucky if it has a leader like Vaishnavi, who never bothered about his comfort but was always haunted by the problems of the community to which he belonged. He has been quite unfortunate because neither the successive state Governments nor the community of the displaced people recognized his selfless services by awarding him with some honour. May God rest his restless soul in peace.

R. L. Shant (Scholar)

A Note I Cannot Write

I do not find it easy to write a note on the late leader Pt. Amarnath Vaishnavi right away, for some reason. Some of my reasons may hold for others also. This kind of difficulty arises out of my community phenomenon. The Kashmiri Pandit community has had significant, educated and politically aware sections of people and more leaders than the people whom they represent. Incidentally, Pt. Amarnath Vaishnavi, the late President of the All-State Kashmiri Pandit Conference (ASKPC), was unlike most leaders. He was not a sceptic or a cynic



and did not mind if his followers chose to have many leaders or listen to those disagreeing with him. He religiously followed the map of action he chartered, caring little for what followed success or failure. This was because he sincerely clung to his very simple principles, come what may. He was happy that his sincerity to the cause won at the end of the day. If it didn't, he did not shift the blame. He thought we also failed because our society has been developing disproportionately since our exile from Kashmir. We are either not amply represented in all walks of life, or those representing us have not been made fully aware of our problems. He was a different leader in many other ways too. One found him always up on his toes, not only when he was called upon to lead a demonstration or a procession of the multitudes but also when he was approached by an individual in distress. Of course, the individual got his support only when he was on the right side of the law, ethics and morality. Before Pandit Vaishnavi set out for the day to put his clout to the test for that person's benefit by meeting some government official, lawyer, doctor, head of an institute etc., the truth of the plaintiff's case was the only consideration for him. He knew his people so closely that he would tell them at the outset about their standing and the fate their plaint was likely to meet. He knew very well that his compatriots were victims of exile, and most could not explain convincingly why they needed his help. And once he came out to help, there was no stopping him. He cared little for his inconvenience. After the work was over, you could see him walking the road alone or waiting for the bus at a crossing. He had so much to tell you, so much to share with you, that within a short period of conversation, you felt equally involved in his world of care and worry for the community. He could not leave you uninfected. Thus, I knew Pandit Vaishnavi. I do not know what to write about such a person, who was so earthly, honest and humane that he hardly looked like a modern-day leader.



## Pradeep Kaul Khodballi (Journalist & Social Activist)

### The Turbaned Pandit

The recent history of Kashmiri Pandits (KPs) is both tragic and tumultuous. The end of the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century spelt a death knell to the much-touted Kashmiriat when the aborigines, Kashmiri Pandits (KPs), the real historic staff bearers of its hoary history, culture and secularism were hounded out of the fabled valley by Islamic fundamentalists. Those times were dismal for the displaced community. Day-to-day survival had become an uphill task. The straws of help were few and far between. There was total helplessness and gloom. The community wanted an anchor around which it could rally. In those dismal times, Amarnath Vaishnavi, wearing a turban, became a virtual central figure in the struggle for survival for KPs. He was not unknown to the community. He was not the product of the latest exile thrust upon the KPs. Amarnath was already visible in the community and beyond. By visibility, I do mean that he was already there occupying the important position to wage a struggle for the community. But soon after the exile, he assumed a central role. The reasons were obvious. The forceful leaders with cold political insight, like Tikka Lal Taploo and Prem Nath Bhat, were already martyred by the terrorists under a game plan which was to rid the KPs of effective leadership in times of crisis. The rest of them on which the community could pin some hope fell in disarray or remained willingly or unwillingly on the margins. But emphatically, Amarnath did not come on the scene to fill the vacuum as a stop-gap person. He was not a man whom you could place as a figurehead and rally behind. Any community faced with a crisis of survival, and more so of KPs who historically have suffered a unique set of problems, cannot veer around a figurehead or a crony. Amarnath Vaishnavi was neither one nor the other. He was what he was, a chaste, simple and honest man, willing to devote all his time to communicate and try to redress the multifarious problems of the exiled community. He became a symbol of the struggle post-1990 for the KPs.



He was always seen in camps, on the roads, on the footpaths, in the Geeta Bhawan, Jammu, in Delhi or elsewhere in the country. He and his turban synergized into one formidable person you could not easily wish away. For him, the turban was the real *Obrey*, which means honour, respect and self-esteem in Kashmiri. If the turban was the *Obrey*, its queer wearer Vaishnavi Ji equally measured up to its essence.

The first event that propelled him to centre stage was the Parmeshwari agitation of 1967. Sheetal Nath had become the focal point of the KPs' historic resistance against injustice. I was a young toddler just beginning to come to terms with the limbs of my own, but the intense passion for agitation of our elders was such that they ensured small boys became part of the struggle. It was at Sheetal Nath that I had my first tryst with Amarnath. The sublime impression of that tryst has always remained with me. At the beginning of the speeches by the leaders, he would electrify the surging crowds with the slogan of Jai Kaara—Har Har Mahadev. In conclusion, the same slogan was raised by him that would rent the air and mesmerize the people. When I ruminate over those events, I feel that the trademark slogan of Amarnath was, in essence, a war cry which goaded the sleepy and timid Pandits to rise and fight for their just rights. A teacher by profession and a non-conformist by nature, he would not countenance the injustices heaped by the dominant political class of the State of Jammu and Kashmir. A nationalist to the core, he strongly espoused the values of real Kashmiriyat. He wanted the state to be an integral part of India where there was no room for the duplicity of power centres. That was perhaps the reason why he plunged headlong into the Praja Parishad movement of 1953. In this agitation, he strongly represented the KPs. As a non-conformist, his rebel streak once again came to the fore when he was transferred to Leh. Pained by the ignorance and abject poverty of the people of Ladakh, he embarked upon a plan to make the Ladakhi Buddhists aware of their social and political rights. His silent work of reform among them started bearing fruit, and today if we see them politically empowered or socially aware, it is due to



the efforts of Amarnath. This fact has been now appreciated by the people of Ladakh themselves.

After 1990 when the entire community of KPs was rooted out of Kashmir, he became a father figure for the community. Geeta Bhawan at Jammu became the pivot around which the hopes of the displaced Pandits revolved. And he was the spirit of that pivot. If Amarnath was not seen by the Pandits, his visit to Geeta Bhawan was a mere waste. He had become a cult figure. Working day and night, he never looked behind. Surprisingly the heavy work did not affect his health. He was in good health for most of the years in Jammu. This was a result of his inner strength and a life-long discipline of an RSS volunteer that kept him going on and on.

Accessibility is one of the cardinal traits of a mass leader. He had this trait in ample measure. His impressive personality, his *Achkan* and turban turned him into an exceedingly becoming person. He would leave an abiding impression on the audience. He lacked the uncanny guise of a politician, but what he had, and that too in full measure, was his honesty. This has been acknowledged by almost all eminent men who had a long association with him. He tried hard to make the struggle of KPs a coordinated one. He utterly failed in it, partly perhaps due to his naivety and partly due to the lukewarm approach of other leaders.

The clout he commanded within the community, in the State and within the corridors of power would have helped him make his life a bit more comfortable. But being honest to the bone, he never aspired for personal gain. Sadly, the KPs did not respond to his needs. Unfortunately, we as a community have not come out of a peculiar syndrome which forces us to think that a leader is born to suffer all his life, even for the basic and bare necessities. What we did to one of our tallest leaders Shiv Narayan Fotedar we repeated with Amarnath too. With disdain, we disregarded his needs. We did not provide him with the basic comforts that a leader of such stature and integrity should have deserved. He was our Amarnath who, despite many of his shortcomings, was our leader. He



had stood his fort when many had deserted. As a man of Karma, he did not need our support. Providence had a majestic end in store for him. He walked his way to embrace death without passing a single day in a hospital. The Turbaned Pandit is now gone. He has left behind a legacy which is difficult to be replicated. Our only recompense will be if we turn as honest in our lives as he was.

## Balkrishan Sanyasi (Writer)

### Dreamer's Dreams Have Come True

Pt. Amarnath Vaishnavi is the name in the history of Kashmiri Pandits, which will be remembered in the socio-political circles of the entire country. His patriotic fervour, his dedication towards the cause of the upliftment of the nation and his conviction for not compromising with the issues of national interest have earned him the name and fame in his state as well as on the national scene.

It was the year 1944 when he completed his matriculation and was eager to join Amar Singh Training Institute Srinagar to receive fine arts training. His dream came true, and he remains among the institute's senior students who availed training from Amar Singh Technical Institute Srinagar under the Principalship of J.C. Mukerjee. The other dream which he had seen in the year 1943 also came true. In that dream, he had seen his Bhabi (sister-in-law) delivering a male baby, after which Amarnath Ji requested his dearest elder brother Late Shri Gopi Nath Vaishnavi, to allow him to take care of the boy who was to be born in the family and that he would look after him like his own son. His elder brother replied to him in the affirmative without any pause.

The male child of his dreams born to his elder brother and eldest sister-in-law in August 1943 is no one other than me. It is true that I was brought up with his due care and affection up to the age of six years and thereafter also when I



was in my teens. These six years were a period of trial and error for me. When I grew up, I learnt from my elders that I used to crawl and make an unsuccessful effort to reach up to a wooden almirah with a Desi Ghee bottle inside kept by Pandit Vaishnavi for my use. He used to open the almirah on alternate days and extract a spoon of ghee from the bottle to put it into my mouth, which I would tastefully swallow. The failure on my part to open the almirah would often make me look towards Pandit Vaishnavi, and I would pull him towards the almirah uttering the words LALA MAH. This was to compel him to get the spoon of ghee to put it into my mouth. This adventure of mine carved out a name for him, and thus Pt. Amarnath Vaishnavi got the name of Lala Ji.

In 1953 I was at Hari Pur Kangra (HP) with my father, Pt. Gopi Nath and my mother, Smt. Somavati Vaishnavi. At that time, Lala Jee was in Pathankot. The Praja Parishad movement was at its peak under the leadership of Pt. Prem Nath Dogra in J&K state. This agitation was for the complete integration of the J&K state with the union of India. The three slogans of those days, EK VIDHAN, EK NISHAN, EK PRADHAN (Single constitution, common flag and a common leader for the entire country including J&K), symbolized the meaning of the ongoing movement, which was later on raising its head in the entire country. It was under the leadership of Doctor Shyama Prasad Mukherji of "Bhartiya Jana Sangh" that the agitation gained momentum in the entire country. Doctor Mukherji got arrested at Ravi Bridge between Punjab and J&K state border when he broke the law and tried to enter the J&K state without getting any permission from the authorities. During those days, special permission was required to enter J&K state as it was not fully integrated with the Indian state after the independence in 1947.

Lala Ji, an RSS activist, also became part of the movement. It was his intention to court arrest as a Satyagrahi; however, before he could do so, a warrant of arrest was given to him when he was getting his shoes polished on the roadside. He was arrested immediately and taken to Gurdaspur jail and then to Ambala jail, and thereafter he was then taken to Shimla Central jail. We came to know at Hari Pur about his arrest through newspapers and the All India Radio news



bulletin. Only fifteen days after his arrest, I got a letter from him from Ambala Central Jail. In this letter, he wrote that he wanted me to come to Pathankot and apply tilak on his forehead before he went for Satyagraha. The letter also gave a brief history of the freedom struggle of India and also stressed the need for the involvement of Kashmiri Pandits in the ongoing patriotic movement. Among other things, he also elaborated on the role of the ancestors of the Vaishnavi family, which they had played from time to time to maintain their dignity and honour against the tyrants of the times.

Lala Ji was a very good artist. I have seen him create new designs from torn cloth pieces, draw paintings, and make portraits of great personalities like Mahatma Gandhi, J.L. Nehru, and Mohd. Ali Jinnah, Shyma Prasad Mukerji, M.S. Golwalkar and portraits of many others, including his father, his brothers and his uncles etc. I was fortunate to see Lala Ji applying brush, colours, chalk, and pencil on the canvas. While at work, he would look like a Yogi busy with his creative, artistic activities. Alas, he could not pursue these activities for long because of his involvement in social, political and cultural work, which he continued till his last breath. However, his imaginative outlook and usage of his brush and colours had a lasting effect on my mind, and thus I grew up as a poet and a writer in the years to come.

What was dearest to Lala Ji was his motherland, and he would not make any compromise with patriotism. In my childhood days, I got the chance to be in his lap and listen to his stories and patriotic songs. He had a melodious voice which would attract my mind, body and my soul together and would also influence my writing.

Last but not least, Lala Ji was a dreamer. As already stated, his dreams had often come true. In June 2006, he fell ill in Jammu in the absence of his family members, but he was accompanied by his friend Shri Hriday Nath Bhat. He saw a dream at 7 pm. In that dream, he met one of his close associates who had died in 1975 and whose name is Pt. Shambu Nath Parimoo, a Unani Hakeem. In that dream, he was concerned that Lala Ji was not taking his illness seriously.



He then advised Lala Ji to call on a particular mobile phone number which he made him remember by repeating the number three times. The number was that of a doctor, and he told him to consult the same doctor. Lala Ji woke up remembering the mobile number and requested Shri Hriday Nath Ji to ring up the said number. Shri Hriday Nath Ji did the needful, and a quick response came from the other side. He was responded to by a young doctor named Dr. Rafiq Bahar, a Government Doctor from Srinagar known for his success in the treatment of various diseases in the state. Lala Ji himself talked to the person on the other side. He followed the treatment that the doctor suggested to him and was cured within a month.

It was his dream to see India emotionally united. When I asked him as to how that unity could be achieved, he replied that it could be done by having a shared consciousness of oneness.

## CL Kaul (Writer)

### Lalaji As I Knew Him

Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, fondly known as Lala Ji, will be remembered as one of the greatest leaders the community has produced in recent times. Known for his honesty, politeness, simplicity and straightforwardness, he will be remembered for the concern he showed for the community in general and for the compassion and sympathy he showed for those members of the community who needed assistance and help in particular. He was always ready to go the extra mile if it helped someone in need. People often talk of the selfless service he extended to the needy and poor and about the responsibility that he shouldered in the wake of the displacement of the members of the Kashmiri Pandit community from the Valley in 1990. He was instrumental in providing relief and assistance to distressed, displaced families irrespective of their affiliations and place of displacement. In the process, he exhibited an



abundance of zeal, energy and warmth inside him, which could be seen even in his old age till he breathed his last. Before his demise, he had successfully undergone an operation in Delhi and thereafter had moved to Jammu to resume his normal activities related to the community's social work. These and other qualities of his head and heart had rightly earned him the place of "The Father of the Community".

My association with Lala Ji was not that old. Though I had read about him and his social activities earlier. It was only a few years back, while I was working on the *Encyclopedia of Kashmiri Pandit Culture and Heritage* and was compiling information about Kashmiri Pandits who had made significant contributions in various walks of life that I got in touch with him over the phone. The response to my call was very positive and full of warmth and reflected a personality with a positive attitude. From the conversation, it appeared as if he had known me for decades. Not only did he send the information I was looking for, but he also followed it up subsequently with a visit to my residence. He wanted to see the work that was being done and get a feel of it. This is understandable given the fact that there was a project in the offing which concerned Kashmiri Pandit Community - the community he had been painstakingly serving since his childhood. He liked the idea of the project very much and was overjoyed to see the work in its totality. He blessed me and wished it to be published at the earliest. His visit impressed me quite a lot as I had met a graceful Kashmiri Pandit in the true sense and a typical Pandit attire, sporting a *dastaar* (turban) and a *tyok* (religious mark) on his forehead. After this, I met Lala Ji several times, both in Delhi and Jammu. Many times, it was a chance meeting in Jammu on the roadside. He was waiting for public transport to attend a social function or a meeting. These chance meetings were more revealing about his personality in the sense that there was a man, down to earth, who, irrespective of personal inconvenience, made it possible to attend a function or meeting. Later on, I learnt that he often used a bicycle as a mode of conveyance when he lived in Kashmir before 1990. After this, the more I met him, the more I started adoring him for his simplicity and unassuming



nature. Here it will not be out of place to make a mention of two other meetings I had with him. The first one was during a wedding ceremony in Jammu. This meeting provided me with an opportunity to talk to him at length about his journey over the years, his achievements to his credit and the regrets, if any, that he had for having thought of something but not quite achieved that. Though he was happy that he served the community to the best of his ability, yet he was kind enough to give credit to all those who worked with him and made things possible. From a historical perspective, I was specifically interested in knowing about the importance of Sheetal Nath and the role this historic place had played in making the history of the community. I had learnt that great personalities like Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi had addressed the gatherings from the precincts of Sheetal Nath and, therefore, was keen to have a glimpse of the heritage photographs. I could see the discomfort that my request had caused him. He was quick to confess that he regretted the act of having passed on the file with all the heritage photographs and other material to someone (he did not disclose the name) for bringing it to light in the form of a book. This, however, never happened.

The second meeting with him was in his office at Muthi. That was the day when the latest issue of *Martand* was ready to be dispatched to the members. He talked about his emotional attachment to the paper and his efforts to revive it. When I asked him whether the paper served its purpose in the present situation and whether it was up to mark, he was honest enough to point out that there are certain deficiencies, but they are trying their best not only to sustain it but also to improve it. I did not pursue the matter further. Among other activities that were going on in the office, the activity about the preparation for *Samohik mekhla* (community Yagnopavit ceremony, the thread ceremony of Brahmins) planned within a month caught my attention. Talking about these activities, Pandit Vaishnavi said that he considered two community activities, namely, *Samohik mekhla* and *Samohik nethar* (collective wedding ceremony), very vital for the community's survival. He was convinced that such activities were the need of the hour and would go a long



way not only in continuing the rich traditions and bringing about much-needed reform but also in helping economically weaker sections of the community to overcome their hardships. In this context, I feel that the best tribute that the community can pay to this stalwart of the community is to see to it that such activities are not only continued in future but also strengthened and expanded to include more beneficiaries.

The passing away of such a dedicated and devoted leader has left a void in the community which will be difficult to fill. The only satisfaction is that people from all sections of society and all walks of life did not only express their condolences but also joined the funeral procession to *Shamshan Ghat*, Bantala, in large numbers. This only shows that he was adored by all. The popularity of this tall community leader and the reverence in which he was held by one and all can also be gauged from the fact that immersion of his ashes was done at more than one place, namely, Chandra Bhaga, Akhnoor, Jammu (on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2012 by his family members); Prayag, Kashmir (on 20<sup>th</sup> July 2012 by ASKPC in collaboration with Zeishta Devi Prabandhak Committee, Srinagar); Ganga, Haridwar (on 11<sup>th</sup> August 2012 by Sh. Chamanlal Moti and his wife Smt. Krishna Moti) and Sindh Nadi, Ladakh (16<sup>th</sup> August 2012 by Buddhist Association, Ladakh). This is rare and can happen only to someone who is a true *Karmayogi*.

Dr. Ramesh Raina (President All India Kashmiri Samaj)

### He Was Born Great

It is difficult to define the persona of a person who devoted his life to the cause of the community and its people, he is none other than Lala Ji. His powerful presence instilled a sense of confidence in every KP, and that is what set him apart from his contemporaries. His helping attitude made him enter not only



every household but his presence was felt in every conceivable area of society. My father would often talk proudly about his contribution to Kashmir. He would tell us about the role he played in educating the Ladakhi about their rights, as there was a generalized feeling of neglect in them. The height of the matter is that he had been sent there on a punishment posting, and he utilized the opportunity to the advantage of the deprived people. He became instrumental in awakening the people and making them conscious of their rights.

While recollecting my memories about the Parmeshwari agitation in 1967, I remember him as a man famous for the slogan Jaikara Har Har Mahadev and "Panj Nara Pandava da Chata Nara Jai Hind". I have grown with these slogans, which deeply impacted me. Ever since then, I have remained emotionally in touch with this saint. He was the most familiar face of that time and is credited with giving momentum to the agitation.

His post-migration innings have also been remarkable as he played an important role in mitigating the problems of the people. That was the time when people had nowhere to go, and nobody was there to listen to their woes. He emerged as the voice of the Kashmiri Pandits at a time when it was needed the most. His contribution shall always occupy an important place in the History of Kashmiri Pandits as he believed in giving without any expectations.

I will quote my personal experience about an important incident. We were once invited to meet the Joint Parliamentary Committee on the Relief and Rehabilitation of the KP community constituted by the Ministry of Home Affairs to discuss its recommendations with them in the Rajya Sabha Secretariat. Mr. Venkaiah Naidu was the Chairman of the said Committee, apart from him, Shri LK Advani and all other important leaders from the Government and the opposition were also a part of it. Lala Ji was also supposed to be a part of the KP delegation. I frantically searched for him and learned that he was not well and was briefly hospitalized. Still, I took a chance and rang him. After being told about the importance of the meeting, he readily accepted



and promised me that he would attend the meeting come what may. To my utter surprise, he came to attend the meeting while still carrying the catheter with him and participated in the meeting, which lasted for two hours. He was greeted warmly by Mr. LK Advani and all the other big leaders. The meeting turned out to be very productive and meaningful. That raised his profile many notches higher up.

Some are born great; greatness is thrust upon some, and some attain greatness. He was born great. May his noble soul rest in peace.

### Raman Bhalla (Ex-Minister of J&K State)

Pandit AN Vaishnavi was a great nationalist known as the guiding force in society.

### Abdul Rehman Veeri (PDP Leader)

Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi was a towering Pandit leader of the state who worked selflessly for the betterment of the people of the state for over six decades. He was a great teacher and an honest politician.

### DS Salathia, President Jammu Bar Association

Mr. Vaishnavi was an outstanding leader. He has no parallel in the modern history of the state. I am highly impressed by the clarity and honesty of Vaishnavi Ji.

### Brig. Suched Singh (RSS Pracharak)

Vaishnavi Ji was a nationalist to the core, and during the 1947 tribal invasion in Kashmir with a dedicated band of patriots, he took part in the preparation of a makeshift runway at Damodar airport in Srinagar to help the Indian army.



## Dr Agnishekhar

Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi was a towering personality who played the best role in strengthening the nationalist movement in Kashmir.

## Ashwini Chrangoo

Words fall short of describing the qualities and mobility, love and affection of Karmayogi Shri AN Vaishnavi, which are sweet memories never to be forgotten.

## Ashok Braroo

Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi burnt the candle of life in service of Hindutva for six decades and led us from the front during the exile period.

## Dr R L Bhat (Social Activist & Writer)

### Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi: The Artless Activist

A lifelong social activist, Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi came to be the face of the Kashmiri Pandit community in its most critical period, viz. the exile from their homeland Kashmir. With his characteristic *saafa* (turban) adorning his head, his long aquiline nose in prominence and his earthly being, announced by his unassuming bearing, Pandit Vaishnavi would be spotted at every place where the Kashmiri Pandits lived during their exile. He led the exiled Pandits by virtue of being the President of the Sanatan Dharma Yuvak Sabha in Kashmir in 1987. It was a well-fought election in which Pandits from all over the valley participated. Pandit Vaishnavi obtained the trust of the community and preserved it until he died in 2012. Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi had not become the repository of the faith of his community for nothing. It marked the



culmination of a lifelong service to the community. He began this activism early, just after passing his matriculation examination in 1944. Seeds of this activism had been sown early on by his association with Balraj Madhok, who taught history at D.A.V. College, Srinagar. Vaishnavi became a *Svayam Sevak*, along with the stalwarts O.N. Kak, J.N. Koul Dhobi, M.L. Aima and Tika Lal Taploo. At the national level, he had taken his RSS training with some of the most prominent persons and later BJP. His involvement in the Praja Parishad agitation in 1953 happened naturally. He was arrested and earned the distinction of being among the persons released as a consequence of the first *Habeas Corpus* writ filed in India.

A Pandit working for the nationalist cause in Kashmir is not a very rewarding enterprise. Vaishnavi was appointed Art Teacher in a government school and posted at Bandipora. His nationalist urge made him an active member of the Vivekanand Society in 1962. He became a prominent leader in the Parmeshwari agitation of 1967 against the forced conversion of a Hindu girl in Kashmir. The slogan '*Jai Kaaraa*' he raised from Sheetal Nath still electrifies the Kashmiri Pandits. The agitation saw a huge mobilization of the people. It put the angst of Kashmiri Hindus against religious persecution on the national scene. That robust articulation of the fight of Kashmiri Pandits for the right to religion was frittered away by the negotiators at the table by portraying it as a cry for petty benefits. Pandit Vaishnavi was posted to Ladakh as a punishment. However, his activism continued. He worked for social awareness among Buddhists in Leh, Ladakh and came close to Buddhist leaders like Koushak Bakola. As a result, Leh began to ferment. Pandit Vaishnavi was transferred back to Kashmir to break the back of this agitation for equality. It is said that the seeds of what came to be later the agitation of the Ladakh Hill Council were sown in that rousing of social and political rights initiated by Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi. For this effort, Pandit Vaishnavi was again arrested in 1969 from Utrasoo in Anantnag, where he had been posted. He continued to work for the community through the seventies. In 1973 as the President of Bhairav Naath Asthaapan, Chattabal, Srinagar, he was badly injured when the



shrine was attacked by Muslim hooligans. He was again arrested when the emergency was declared in June 1975. After retiring from his job as a teacher, he became a full-time activist. Pandit Vaishnavi's efforts, especially his access to then-prominent leaders in Delhi, are said to have contributed to bringing the governor's rule in J&K in 1990 when militancy was at its peak. Kashmiri Pandits, along with a handful of Muslims and Sikhs, were forced into exile from their ancestral place. Pandit Vaishnavi, as the president of Yuvak Sabha/ASKPC and the Vice-President of *Jammu Kashmir Sahayata Samiti* at Jammu, strained all his resources to succour the citizens turned refugees in their land. The initial problem of a roof over the head and food for the belly was aggravated as the 'return in months' turned into a wait for uncertain years. Pandit Vaishnavi tried to address their problems. These efforts, aided no doubt by a battery of other activists, brought tents and temporary relief. A more lasting relief was the admission of the young boys and girls to Technical Institutes of other states, particularly in Maharashtra, in which Pandit Vaishnavi had a primary role. Then there were the day-to-day problems which homeless people are prone to. Pandit Vaishnavi was always ready and responsive to these calls from the community members. Kashmiri Pandits all over are grateful to him for his service to the community.

This gratitude earned him laudation after laudation from the exiled community, including the "Father of The Community" title, in 2005. He also tried to unite the community to meet the larger challenges, but the rifts of the early years of exile turned out to be irreconcilable. Before Amarnath Vaishnavi breathed his last on the 1st of July 2012 at the refugee camp at Buta Nagar in Jammu, his last lament was that Kashmiri Pandits were scattered. That challenge calls for an awakening on the part of the larger community towards their plight. The community needs to realize that theirs is a collective problem, that of being in exile. The community must get activated. That would be a fitting tribute to the lifelong activism of Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi. May he prove to be a beacon light for Kashmiri Pandits.



## Rohini Vaishnavi (Social Entrepreneur)

### My Grandfather As I Knew Him

The sudden and unexpected demise of my beloved grandfather, Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, has pushed me back into memory lane and unfolded all my memories of him. Memories - that say so much about him as a human being. He was someone whom I remember as a person who filled the whole air with happiness when he was around. He was a safe haven for children because he brought with him so much forgiveness that any mistake was pardoned. He acted as my advocate to fight my case against someone I would have offended as a kid. "Noted for future" is what he would say to the other person with a gentle smile to negotiate for their forgiveness. This "Noted for future" meant the mistake would not be repeated. 'Lalaji', as we fondly called him, was a favourite for this reason among children in our generation as well as the generation to which my parents belonged. His forgiveness and tolerance for the errors that we as children (even grown-ups) committed is a quality which I did not see in anyone till now in my entire life. However, his forgiveness and tolerance were not something that would let me get away with my erroneous behaviour. On the contrary, it was a great responsibility as his commitment of "Noted for future" was to be met, or else 'Lala' would be disappointed. Humans are prone to making mistakes, but we are very lucky if our loved ones, especially elders, accept us as we are and give us enough room to work on our mistakes to be a better person. This trait of his personality made him a favourite of his students, too, irrespective of their religion or caste. During the Emergency when he was jailed, his students caught a glimpse of him when he would go for a walk, and they would run up a hill with baskets of mangoes for their favourite master Ji.

I have read in one of my favourite books that a person's love for things in life is determined by the amount of time they spend on them. 'Lala' would wake up very early in the morning while I would be in a deep sleep, and suddenly



his loud and melodious song “*Uth Jaag Musafir Bhor Bhai Ab Rain Kahan Jo Sowat Hai*” would start reverberating in the entire house and even in the close neighbourhood at our home at Chattabal, Srinagar. This normally irritated me as it disturbed my sleep, and then lovingly, he would wake me up by saying a number of things which included the benefits of getting up early etc. He was regular with exercise and *Pranayam* everyday morning in addition to spending about one hour performing *Pooja* and meditation. He would assign me the job of performing all *Pooja* rituals when he was out of town travelling for work; these rituals also included feeding two mice with rice that regularly came into the *Pooja* room and ate that rice without disturbing anything else. He said that they were the *Mushaks* of Lord Ganesha. At night he would put me to sleep again with his favourite Lori – “*So Ja Rajkumari*”. Sometimes he would apply warm oil on my stomach to relieve me of my stomach ache and wrap me up with a warm, thick cloth. I remember he took me to a homoeopathic doctor when my hair was falling and to an Ayurvedic doctor when I had a boil on my leg. Whenever there was a parent-teacher meet at my school, it was he who had to visit. I would insist that he wear a suit, not Kurta Pajama (his usual attire). He would wear his round-neck coat and a yellow/pink turban. In the evening, he would ask me with a smile whether he looked handsome or not (as required by me) when he visited my school.

I vividly remember an incident in my childhood when I was about 8 – 10 years old. He came home late as usual, and I had already fallen asleep. He had bought me a small plastic toy kitchen set. He not only bought it but also set it up in my play area by arranging all the little utensils, gas stove etc, the way they are kept in a normal kitchen. He came to me, gently woke me up, and said he had a surprise for me. He held my hand, took me to my play area, and said, “Look what I have for you”. For a little girl, it was the most exhilarating and happy moment. That moment of happiness which he brought to me then is something I still cherish. On another occasion, he announced a tea party which was to be carried out in my toy tea set. Everybody had to drink tea in those cups. It was his immense love for his grandchildren which enabled him to



meticulously consider things that mattered most to us and then strive to make them available to us. During the winter vacations, he would make a timetable for me, which in addition to the time for study and play, would have fifteen minutes for help with the household work. When I asked him what help I could be of, he would say in his gentle tone, "*Khos vos chu na aasaan tulun*". (Picking up used cups someone left after having tea). Additionally, he used to give me pages in a four-line notebook for my handwriting improvement. He was a disciplinarian himself, and that is what he passed on to us. His timetable concept has deepened in me and taught me the value of time in life. He was someone who taught us that we could be happy and content with whatever was available to us. He taught us to be together as a family and celebrate life within the given means. This reminds me of how he used to make the birthdays of all the children very special events. As a kid, I used to look forward to the evening on my birthday or any of my brother's or sister's birthdays. He would get *nadir monja* (*pakodas* made of lotus stem) and sweets for the evening tea party, which was attended by the entire family. Being a big family, he had to ensure the snacks sufficed for all. He would often cut one *Gulab Jamun* into two to make it available to all. Tea and snacks were followed by some entertainment presented by the children. My brothers and I worked hard to prepare for the evening entertainment, often a play, solo songs and dance. The whole family would applaud and enjoy our presentation.

His artistic skills, which he had acquired through his Diploma in Art, certified by City & Guilds London, enabled him to use all the waste at home and turn it into beautiful objects. He also made portraits of Guruji, Dr Hedgewar and his father and brother, which we later lost to militancy. His wonderful sense of humour always filled us with great happiness and excitement. He would jokingly say things such as, "I am soon going to be selected for a Bollywood film as an actor, and all I have to do is wear a wig to conceal my bald head". He added, "I am still young and strong; do you want to fight with me?" He had immense respect for the womenfolk in the family. He would personally sit with his daughters-in-law and ask them whether they were eating well on



occasions such as Shivratri. On such occasions, women usually choose to eat later than the other family members due to their busy schedule with cooking and serving all the delicacies to the rest of the family. He was ambitious for his granddaughters and daughter, whom he wanted to be well-educated and assume leadership roles in their lives. In a nutshell, he was full of life and vivacity, someone who infused energy, happiness and hope in the whole family.

He was my life trainer who taught me all the practical aspects of living. One day after our displacement in 1990, when we lived at Bakshi Nagar, Jammu, he took me to the Canara Bank, and my day's lesson was "how to withdraw cash from the bank through a cheque". He took me to the telegraph office in Kachi Chawni the second time to teach me how to send a telegram. I still follow his advice of keeping all important papers packed in a handy manner so that they are easy to carry in case of an emergency evacuation. His advice helped us in real life when we moved from Srinagar in 1990 while he was travelling outside J&K for work. His safety tips are something I pass on to my seven-year-old daughter. As a kid, he would educate me about various possible risks that children face while outside the home. His constant reminders and education saved my life when I was nine years old.

My discussions with him as a child communicated to me some of the values by which he lived. He said that despite losing his mother after birth, he had the most satisfying childhood. He had no complaints about his childhood because he was loved by many people who were part of his large family. When he lived in Jammu as a child, he had a friend named 'Gaje Singh', whose mother loved him like her own son. He said that as a child, he was very accommodating and would get along with most people. Also, he was a good-looking child, and he believed that all this made him a favourite of all his elders. With a bowl of food in his hands, his uncle would make him sit on his shoulders and take him around the neighbourhood, feeding him slowly on the way. While doing so, he would meet several acquaintances who would cuddle the kid seated on the shoulders. He fondly remembered his childhood which he claimed was the happiest. I believe that he had an innate ability to focus on good things around



him that kept him happy without being sorry about what wasn't there. Despite the adversities in life, whether the loss of his mother and then his wife early in life, he had a unique ability to see only the good and leverage the positive aspects of life rather than regretting the undesirable. On the contrary, he was happy within and felt the pain of the entire human population around him and took the lead to alleviate their suffering during his whole life.

According to him, his happy childhood developed him into a person who was confident and capable of loving others unconditionally. He often used to say that he was so contented within that he had no expectations from the external world. As far as I remember, he always stood on top of situations with the least dependence on anyone while always being a symbol of assurance and strength to all of us in the family. He continued to be so till his last breath when he passed away in the evening after attending to his regular work schedule. He would tell me with pride the story of our ancestor who sacrificed huge land and property in Chattabal (which was later government property) merely to stand by his principles and not succumb to any pressures from the then minister of the king of Kashmir who expected from him something which his conscience would not allow him to do. Standing by his principles without fearing the consequences, with the least concern about wealth and money, is what he lived by all his life.

Vijay Bakaya (Ex Chief Secretary – J&K)

Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi —The Voice of Voiceless

I came to know Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi closely after the displacement of the community in 1990. Before that, I had known about him as an impassioned teacher who had made a mark in Kashmir. When I met him for the first time, it was in my capacity as Divisional Commissioner, Jammu. He



was leading a delegation of displaced Kashmiri Pandits. What I noted was that while others in the group were putting forth their demands intensely and were expressing their anger and despair, which was natural, Pandit Vaishnavi explained with great self-control what was required to be done by the administration. I immediately struck a chord with him, and thereafter he acted along with Shri Hiralal Chatta, Shri Motilal Malla, and many more as a bridge between me and the Kashmiri Pandit Community. He was always available for consultation with the administration and never allowed the pain of uprooting to be expressed in an agitational way. Because of his cool and farsighted behaviour at this time of acute distress, the administration was able to attend to the main task of providing relief and succour. After this turbulent phase settled into a more placid activity of rebuilding lives, Sri Vaishnavi continued to be at the forefront of articulating the Kashmiri Pandit issues, and he came to be accepted as the main spokesman of the community. I will cherish the affection and regard that he always gave me, and the whole community should remember his statesman-like role during displacement. He was a man with the courage of conviction, but he did not exhibit any rancour or any malice. He was a humanist to the core.

## Predhuman K. Joseph Dhar (Journalist)

### Amarnath Vaishnavi: Man of the Masses

The turbaned roaring lion of the Kashmiri Pandit community, Amarnath Vaishnavi, with a pronounced Tilak on his forehead, moderate in bodily stature, ever sporting a smile on his face, possessed all the qualities of head and heart that made him a true leader of the community. He was a rebel in his own right, a philanthropist, and over and above it, a human being par excellence, ever ready to come to the succour of the needy and the downtrodden. His life taught us to be ordinary humans in every sphere of activity, living extraordinary



lives. In great appreciation for his leadership of my community in exile, I write this piece as a tribute to him.

Simple and approachable, Pandit Vaishnavi was ever ready to listen and learn. A progressive at heart, he had maintained all through the image of a people's leader. More at ease with the ordinary than the powers-that-be, he had been a friend of all those working for a cause and had been very supportive. He was a person of a discerning mind and a sensitive heart, ever ready to engage in dialogue and enter the world of others. Sensitive to the issues of marginalization and discrimination, he stood up like the Rock of Gibraltar for their causes. I consider him a man of the masses who had made his contribution as a people's intellectual to the well-being of the Kashmiri Pandit community and the nation.

He became a part of the Praja Parishad Movement launched by Pandit Premnath Dogra to achieve the total integration of the Jammu and Kashmir State with the Indian Union. He became part and parcel of the slogan "*Ek Nishan, Ek Pradhan, Ek Vidhan*". He was arrested and sent to jail.

My first interface with him was at Leh in 1969-70 when he was transferred there on punishment by the government on some cooked, fabricated and baseless charges. I had earlier seen him delivering fiery speeches from Sheetal Nath during the "Parmeshwari agitation", shouting a full-pitched, self-coined slogan which had become a war cry of our community during the agitation. "*Jai Kara, Har Har Mahadev, Panj Nara Pandava da, Chata Nara Jai Hind.*" At Leh, I was told by well-meaning people that as a Physical Education teacher in the sixties in Leh, Vaishnavi Ji was the man behind opposing the conversion of Buddhists to Islam under a well-managed plan and also educating the Ladakhis that they were discriminated against in every sphere of life by the government.

The mass exodus of our community from the valley in 1990 saw Amarnath helping the community members get accommodated in tented camps in every possible way at Jammu. He burnt the midnight oil in doing his best to come



to the assistance of the needy. He established his office in Geeta Bhawan, Jammu, where people rushed to him for assistance which was easily available to them. He knew no rest during those days.

Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi was genuinely proud that the Kashmiri Pandit is an inseparable part of the Indian civilization that has always been secular and pluralistic in its outlook. He was of the view that the secularism of India was rooted in the millennia of the civilization's experience of the Indian people, a civilization in which every major faith in the world found a home, was nurtured and evolved alongside a rich and challenging diversity of sceptical, rationalistic, atheistic and agnostic beliefs. Indian secularism entails, therefore, not a denial of faith but equal respect for all faiths, including the absence of faith with all the symbols, philosophical trappings and ethical imperatives of these different systems of belief. It derives from an unbroken multi-hued tapestry of practice and teachings of tolerance and love, including those of the Buddha, Kabir, Nana, Sufi Saints and Bhakti reformers. It is overlaid in its modern incarnation of democratic secularism with not just equal respect for all faiths but also the guarantee for the practitioners of these diverse faiths of equal rights and protection under the secular law of the country. He was, therefore, critical of all those who practiced fanaticism and fundamentalism.

Pandit Vaishnavi, in his speeches, always referred to the Constitution of Independent India that pledges freedom and equal rights to all citizens, regardless of the God they worship or choose not to worship, regardless of whether they are women or men, regardless of their caste, wealth, ethnicity, the colour of their skin, and the language they speak.

Pandit Vaishnavi always was critical of the policies of the Central Government that failed to protect the constitutional rights of the Kashmiri Pandits. He rightly earned the epithet of the "Father of the Kashmiri Pandit Community". I call him Ho Chi Minh of Indo-China, who cooked his food and washed his clothes and was often seen footing out long distances.



*Badi Mushkil Say Hota Hai Chaman Mein Didawar Paida.*

Pandit Vaishnavi is no more on this mortal soil; let us be consoled and sing with John Milton:

*"In the blest kingdoms meek of joy and love*

*There entertain him all the Saints above,*

*In solemn troops and sweet societies,*

*That sing, and singing is their glory move*

*And wipe the tears forever from his eyes."*

May his soul rest in peace in the loving lap of my Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Thatha Astu.

Dr Farooq Abdullah (Politician)

Condolence Letter for the Bereaved Family

I have known Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi as a mass leader and a freedom fighter with a long and rich experience in public life. A secular-minded person who worked for mutual brotherhood and communal harmony, Shri Vaishnavi will be remembered for his untiring efforts in supporting the cause of Kashmiri Pandits for a peaceful life in Kashmir. In his death, the community has lost a great leader whose contribution will be remembered for a long time to come.



## All-Party Meet (Jammu, July 2018)

### Tributes to Mr. Amarnath Vaishnavi

Members of the all-party meet recalled Mr. Vaishnavi as an icon of Indian nationalism in Kashmir, who played a pioneering role in the Praja Parishad movement in 1952-53 and propagated nationalism among the people during forties in Punjab and Kashmir. They also recalled his role in the 1947 Pak invasion when Mr. Vaishnavi and a youth brigade volunteered to take on the invaders until the Indian Army landed in Kashmir and his role in the 1967 Parmeshwari agitation.

Mr. Vaishnavi's role in leading the nationalist movement in Leh and his selfless services to the community, especially his role after the mass exodus of Pandits in the valley, was also highly lauded by the speakers. They said that Mr. Vaishnavi struggled to strengthen nationalist forces and democracy in the state and that he was jailed for 19 months during the emergency. Mr. Raman Bhalla, then Revenue, Relief and Rehabilitation Minister, addressed him as a guiding force in the society who never compromised on his principles. He said that Mr. Vaishnavi played a stellar role in fighting for the cause of Kashmiri Pandits throughout his life. Dr Jitendra Singh of BJP called him a nationalist leader. Dr Agnishekhar, the convenor of Panun Kashmir, termed him an icon of nationalism who had a great role in strengthening the nationalist movement in Kashmir along with Mr. Balraj Madhok. Mr. K.K Khosa, the president of KP Sabha, said that Mr. Vaishnavi gave his life to serve the Pandit community.

National Conference MLC Mr. Vijay Bakaya termed Mr. Vaishnavi a man who was down to earth and selflessly served society.



## Kundan Kashmiri (President – Kashmiri Pandit Conference)

### Father of the Kashmiri Pandit Community

Legendary and veteran leader crowned with the title Father of the community, the late Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi was a symbol of the national school of thought, which presented an example of an alternative way of life. He worked in adverse circumstances to strengthen the nationalist forces in the state of Jammu & Kashmir. Throughout his life, he showed a path for leading a life with dignity and honesty without striking compromises for short-term interests at a time when nationalist society in the state had been subjugated to develop a slavish mentality. It was God's will that the late Amarnath led the Kashmiri Pandit community in turmoil. Amarnath is remembered as one of the great leaders of Kashmir who devoted his entire life to the welfare of society. His inner qualities of faithfulness, honesty, patriotic feelings and courage gave him the strength to lead society. The Father of the community, Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi, always stood like a rock to defend the interests of Kashmir and the nation as a whole. He was always seen pleading for the cause of the Kashmiri Pandits on every platform. His activities and deep involvement in the affairs of his community and country had added to his dignity, and his towering personality impressed all, whether they were his followers or his critics. The mass exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from the valley in 1989-1990 set a challenge for the Hindu community, and the father of the community Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi boldly took this challenge and left no stone unturned in mitigating the pain and sufferings of the Pandit community. His tireless efforts in motivating BJP and Shiv Sena leadership in Maharashtra to reserve seats in professional colleges and universities for the displaced students of the community was remarkable. Apart from being a government employee, he was a staunch social activist and a staunch RSS pracharak who spread the ideology of RSS in the valley. He participated in the Praja Parishad movement launched by Pandit Prem Nath Dogra. As a young boy, he actively participated in the Durga Nath Protest march in Kashmir and played a key role in safeguarding



the Hindu-Sikh interests during the tribal invasion in 1947. During the communal riots in parts of south Kashmir in 1986, he stood like a rock and met the President of India, the Prime Minister of India and many other social and political leaders of the country, apprising them about the situation in Kashmir. He was a great advocate for the total integration of J&K with the Union of India. As a front-line leader, the late Amarnath, also known as Lala Ji, pleaded for the cause of the Kashmiri Pandit community in exile at various platforms to draw the attention of the globe towards the plight of the Kashmiri Pandits. He reached the doorstep of Shri V.P Singh, the then Prime Minister of India, to save Kashmir from devastation. He developed close connections with the top leaders of the BJP, namely, Shri Atal Behari Vajpayee, Shri L.K. Advani, Shri Murli Manohar Joshi and Shri Kedarnath Sahni simply to work for the rehabilitation of the displaced community and to have a keen eye on the Kashmir events. His revolutionary ideology and nationalist outlook made him not only the voice of his community but also the voice of Kashmir. The memories and sacrifices of the late Amarnath can never be forgotten, and his close association with the country's top leaders is worth remembering. In 2009, he met Shri Vajpayee Ji with me at his residence at 6-A at Krishna Menon Marg, New Delhi, for about an hour, and immediately thereafter, we met Shri Kedarnath Sahni. We discussed with them the problems the displaced Hindu community of Kashmir faced. In 2010 he and I had a couple of meetings with the Election Commissioner of India where in late Amarnath pleaded for four constituencies in exile to be allotted to the displaced Kashmiri community. It was in 2010 that he sat on Dharna outside the police station near Jantar Mantar, New Delhi, for the release of about three dozen Kashmiri Pandits who were detained for protesting in the VVIP zone near the residence of Shri Saifuddin Soz at New Delhi and simultaneously approached top BJP leadership including Shri L.K. Advani for their release. In 2010 during his visit to Delhi, Shri Amarnath and I attended twenty years exile Maha Shradh function at I.T.O New Delhi, organized by Panun Kashmir and later attended a big programme at Jantar Mantar New Delhi organized by K.S.D. and the Kashmiri Pandit conference and also other organizations. Amarnath, in a



strongly worded warning to the government, said that the government should be prepared for serious consequences if the Kashmiri Pandit community is ignored by the leaders at the helm of affairs. Amarnath was interested in spreading the branches of the All State Kashmiri Pandit Conference in other parts of the country, and on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2010, a unit of ASKPC started functioning in New Delhi. Since the organization could not get registered in the name of ASKPC in New Delhi for legal reasons, the organization is now working in Delhi under the name of the Kashmiri Pandit Conference. Late Amarnath, during the years of exile, toured almost all parts of the country, meeting the displaced Kashmiri Pandit community and various social organizations to see that the sufferings of the displaced community were removed and they lived honourably.

### Rajinder Premi (Social Activist)

Some are born with God-given extraordinary abilities, creative acumen & talent, who give the world new direction by virtue of such sublime qualities. These people look & behave like ordinary citizens, but their intellect & sensibilities make them towering, to carve out a niche for themselves and make an everlasting impact, thus leaving behind a great legacy. Lala Ji, as we called him out of love and respect, was one such legendary soul.

Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi was born in Aug 1925. As a child, he developed social and political commitment in his school days, which grew with the passing years. He had the inborn qualities of a pure Hindu heart and remained a devout Hindu his entire life. He was interested in community affairs from his days of infancy as a conscious Kashmiri Pandit and later turned out to be the unchallenged leader of Kashmiri Pandits and became the President of the All State Kashmiri Pandit Conference (ASKPC). He was not only popular within his community but was also respected by the majority community of Muslims in Kashmir as well as the Dogras of Jammu & the Ladakhis.



After the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits, Vaishnavi Ji had been an inspiration for the younger generation. He took control of the affairs of the exiled community into his hands at Jammu, which resulted in the setting up of tented accommodation, relief organization and adjusting displaced people in schools or other government buildings. He cherished the dream of continuing the publication of the daily 'Martand', a voice of KPs of Kashmir.

The exiled community can't forget the late Vaishnavi Ji's un-filching integrity and love for his community. His untiring services to the whole of humanity will always be remembered by all, as he had devoted his entire life to the human cause, for which he remained a lifelong activist.

I joined the arena of Social Service after we landed in Delhi in May 1990 after being forced to flee from our homeland, Kashmir, in the backdrop of the martyrdom of my illustrious father & beloved younger brother. I became the first Kashmiri migrant to be associated with the Kashmiri Samiti Delhi, where I was appointed chief coordinator. My contact & rapport with Shri Lala Ji became stronger. He would come to attend our meetings, seminars and symposia directly from Jammu and would discuss all matters of migrant relief, rehabilitation & welfare measures.

Vaishnavi Ji was a part of the delegation of the Kashmiri Pandits, which was invited by the Standing Committee of Parliament, Ministry of Home Affairs, to hear us in the Parliament-annexe about our hardships, difficulties and problems. The delegation was led by Shri M K Kaw, President AIKS. A joint community representation was made by the Late Kaw himself, which was unanimously prepared by all of us earlier. Shri Vaishnavi was very happy with our conduct and approach during the exercise.

National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) was hearing us during the petition of genocide from 1993-1999, and during some hearings, Mr. Vaishnavi was also present at my request. He was much impressed by my documentation work and arguments, after which he came to my Lodhi Road residence to give me a pat for all this.



It was only during one of the hearings at NHRC that we were asked as petitioners to nominate one Kashmiri Pandit for the apex committee for displaced people to be constituted for the welfare of the exiled community by the commission. Shri Vaishnavi was a unanimous choice, although the NHRC wanted a KP petitioner for this job. As a petitioner, I requested the NHRC to include a KP in the redressal mechanism, which the NHRC had earlier agreed to on my continuous persuasion for forming an apex committee at the J&K State Government level.

Besides this, Late Vaishnavi Ji participated in most of the regional conclaves and meetings of the All India Kashmiri Samaj (AIKS) held at Jammu in the year 1992-93, at Chandigarh in the year 1996, at Delhi in Year 2000, 2001, 2003, in Faridabad in the year 1997 & 1999, in Bengaluru in the year 2004 and at Calcutta in 2006.

Shri Vaishnavi has inspired the younger generation with the qualities of his head and heart. I pay my humble tributes to this great man, who has left an indelible impression on all of us with his honesty and dedication to the community's welfare.

Arvind Shah (Author)

*"Hum Kashmiri Pandit Bikhar Gayee"* (We Kashmiri Pandits are Torn Apart)

Amarnath Vaishnavi lived in downtown Srinagar. He resided in Chattabal. Our family lived in the neighbourhood of Safakadal.

He was a highly acceptable public person who spoke clearly and candidly. He had nothing to hide, and he said what he believed in. He had no trick up his sleeve for personal gain. I tried to contemplate his gains or gains to his family members and associates by virtue of being a known community leader and a



person having access to the corridors of power, but I have not been able to lay my hands on any.

The Kashmiri Pandit community has gone through a lot of thick and thin in recent times. Democracy and independence of India have brought no recipe to Kashmiri Pandits in Kashmir. When one studies the different aspects of Kashmiri pandits in Kashmir whether social, political, economic, religious, academic, professional or any other area of living and survival of the community, one of the persons who has played a well-defined role in the survival and growth of the community in Kashmir is Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi. His role is not limited to Kashmiri Pandits alone, he worked in Ladakh to save the demographic and cultural ethos of the place. There have been many and greater areas of work where the intervention of Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi was consequential, whether it was the massacre of Kashmiri pandits in 1953 or the social erosion of the Kashmiri Pandit community in 1967 or the voice against emergency in the country or exodus of 1990, Pandit Amarnath Vaishnavi played a role of purpose. He was jailed many times for his activism. But nothing was ever proved against him. Because of his strong and clean character, nothing could even be cooked up against him to frame him.

He was not limited in his activism from Ladakh to Lakhanpur, but he extended his persona beyond Pathankot to reach the capital of the country, where he commanded due respect as a voice of Kashmiri Pandits and democracy. When I received a telephone call from Shri Bal Krishen Sanyasi to write this article for the book, I asked him what were the last words from Pandit Vaishnavi about the community. He replied that the last words were: "Hum Kashmiri Pandit Bikhar gayee – We Kashmiri Pandits have got scattered."

*'Jai Kara – Har Har Mahadev'*: salutation to you for your abode with Har Har Mahadev.



## Prof. KL Tickoo (Writer & Poet)

He is Amar

The patriotic revival in Pandit Vaishnavi, fondly known as Bub, Papaji and Lalaji, carried messages among members of a revolutionary group of Kashmiri pandit youth when he was only six years old. Shri DN Nadim, JN Koul, KN Mahnoori, RN Dhar, and NN Raina were some prominent members of the group. As a student of class 7, he had the taste of the first lathi charge during the Durga Nag agitation but continued to crave for Swaraj and was keen to participate in the freedom struggle. He sprouted the roots of RSS in the Valley in the year 1944-45, along with Shri Tika Lal Taploo, Omkar Nath Kak, Som Nath Ogra, Janki Nath Dhobi, Makhan Lal Aima and many others under the patronage of Prof. Balraj Madhok. In 1947, when Pakistani invaders tried to grab the Valley, he, along with his friends, rushed to the Srinagar airport to assist authorities in ensuring the security of the airport by keeping an eye on the nefarious designs of the invaders and stood guard with others around temples where Hindus and Sikhs had taken temporary shelter, after fleeing from their homes for security. He was a great admirer of Maharaja Hari Singh and adopted his style of headgear (dastaar) and continued to wear it along with a tilak on his forehead, without fear, till the day he breathed his last, as a symbol of Kashmiri Pandit's identity, honour and self-respect. People in the state and elsewhere, irrespective of their religion, caste, community, and political affiliation, are unanimous in their observation that Pandit Vaishnavi upheld the honour and prestige of his headgear till the end and did not let the community down.

Lalaji was a spiritualist having great faith in the Hindu way of life. Sanatan Dharma was deeply embedded in him, and one would always find him at the forefront in performing rituals like Yagnyas etc. The incident of Bahukhatkeshwar Bhairava Nath temple at Chhatabal, Srinagar, in the year 1973, is one such example where Muslims, without any provocation, pelted



stones on the premises where Yagya was being performed by Lalaji, as a result of which he sustained severe head injuries and had to be rushed to hospital by his family and the neighbours.

He was an embodiment of simple living and high thinking. I have never seen anger in him. The only time I saw him somewhat angry was recently in Delhi, where his family resisted his departure for Jammu before completing the medical treatment. He was bent on returning to serve the community he called his family.

### Utpal Koul (Social Activist)

In 1967, the atmosphere was surcharged in Kashmir, daily Satyagraha was on, and the reason was the first love Jihad in Kashmir, the Parmeshwari episode. All ladies in Rainawari decided to go to Sheetal Nath; I insisted to my mother that I would join. I was in sixth grade then. In Sheetal Nath, there were nearly ten thousand people on its lawns and ten people on the stage. Only one person with a pink turban would stand after every speaker, and he would loudly say "Jaikara", and people would thunder back "Har-Har Mahadev". That was my first introduction to Amarnath Vaishnavi. I never knew at that time that I would be fortunate enough to work with him closely for three decades. But after three years, we went together to Jammu to participate in a program of RSS Sar Sanghchalak's respected Guru Golwalkar, fondly known as Guruji.

After listening to the brilliant speech of Guruji, we attended a meeting with him. But eleven Swayamsewaks of Kashmir were invited by Guruji separately to discuss Kashmir. I was surprised that only one person Guruji knew was Amarnath Vaishnavi.

Amarnath Vaishnavi was a saint, living a worldly life, a teacher, and a social and political activist. Kashmiri Pandits call him a legendary leader of the community. I was lucky to be his deputy for almost seven years, so we travelled



to hundreds of villages together and visited hundreds of families. Therefore, I learned a lot because of his practical experience.

Amarnath Ji was arrested many times, and during the Emergency, he was kept in Central Jail in Srinagar; I regularly went to meet him there. After the Anantnag riots, we travelled together to Delhi to meet National leaders, including the President, PM, Home Minister and opposition leaders.

After the exodus in 1990, he fought from the front; he gave real leadership to the Kashmiri Pandit community. It was a huge responsibility to provide relief, rehabilitation, education and jobs to the displaced community, which he shouldered. It was Vaishnavi Ji who managed to create a separate quota of seats for displaced Kashmiri students in educational institutes all over India.

Amarnath Ji was a selfless human being who never did anything for himself or his family. Kashmiri Pandit Community was his family, and Bharat Mata his home.

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Balkrishan sanyasi is a Kashmiri poet and a writer. He has published two poetry collections in Kashmiri language and was nominated thrice for Sahitya academy award. He has recently published a collection of essays about the ancient heritage of Kashmir.

He has written more than 100 papers on language, literature and social issues and presented in various literary forums. His poems have been translated into many Indian regional and foreign languages.

He is a member of the expert committee with the ministry of information and broadcasting and the ministry of culture.

Born in 1943 in Srinagar J&K, he completed his Masters in Political Science from Kashmir University and joined Accountant Generals office. Teaching being his passion, he taught Political Science to post graduate students.

He has a keen eye on the changing political scenario that confronts nation states which is reflected in his writings. He has been writing since his college days.



An insight into many untold facts describing the position of Kashmiri Pandits since the pre-independence era, the subsequent developments that shaped the socio-cultural and political environment in J&K, the sowing of the seeds of terrorism much before they showed up and the factors that led to the world's largest mass exodus of people in their own country, this biography chronicles historic events witnessed and led by Pandit Amaranth Vaishnavi dating back to 1947 up to the year 2012.

Amaranth Vaishnavi was a social activist at the grass root and was at the helm of various historic events pertaining to Kashmiri pandits that shaped history and influenced the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. His negotiations with the government led to the rehabilitation of displaced Kashmiri pandits who lost their homes during their mass exodus from Kashmir in 1990

A man who was so influential was never tempted to accumulate wealth or use power to help himself or his close family members. He lived a down to earth life in one of the Kashmiri refugee colonies in Jammu.

He was honoured with the title, "Father of the Kashmiri pandit community".

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